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# The New York Times

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## China quests for the holy grail of meat

Jacob Dreyer

### OPINION

SHANGHAI In late September, 11 Republican members of Congress wrote to the directors of national intelligence and the Department of Agriculture's Office of Homeland Security to warn of the latest threat emerging in China. They said China seeks to become the world leader in production of meat alternatives — part of a “targeted attempt to dominate global food supply chains” that could pose an urgent threat to the food security of the United States and its allies.

It's the type of reaction we see often in Washington these days, where everything China does is viewed through the narrow and often skewed prism of national security, regardless of whether it's positive for the world. Not satisfied with trying to render our gas guzzlers obsolete with its electric vehicles, the thinking goes, the Chinese Communist Party is apparently coming for our burgers and holiday turkeys, too.

The letter was right about one thing: China is serious about achieving breakthroughs in so-called future foods, which include lab-grown, plant-based and other alternative meats. As China's appetite has grown, the government in 2021 made the creation of domestic alternative protein industries part of its national economic development strategy. It's become a central component of wide-ranging plans to achieve food security, and funding is pouring into new research initiatives.

Sure, the geopolitical rivalry with the United States is almost certainly part of what is motivating China; it wants to become self-sufficient in food in case tensions with the United States worsen to the point of war.

But there is much more to this picture. The age-old way of producing meat — clearing forests to feed vast herds of greenhouse-gas-emitting livestock whose flesh is shipped

DREYER, PAGE 11



Police personnel in Meerut, in the Indian state of Uttar Pradesh, watching video feeds of aspirants for police jobs taking a retest in August. Questions for the first test had been leaked.

### MEERUT, INDIA

## Thieves see a gold mine in exams for government jobs coveted by millions

BY MUJIB MASHAL AND HARI KUMAR

The call arrived — it was go time. The medical doctor rushed to the airport, bound for a midnight operation hundreds of miles away in western India.

But this mission was not about saving lives. The doctor carried a screwdriver, a pair of pliers, a blade and a cellphone — tools for a heist. His target was something worth more than gold in India's cutthroat competition for government jobs and university placements: the question sheets for a police constable exam.

After landing in the city of Ah-



Studying for a civil service exam in Delhi. Last year, 1.3 million people applied for 1,000 civil service slots in the central government. India has too few jobs for its educated youth.

medabad, the doctor, Shubham Mandal, was hurried to a freight warehouse on its outskirts, according to police documents and interviews with the lead investigator by The New York Times. To avoid surveillance cameras, Dr. Mandal climbed through a back window into a room stacked with boxes. There, the police say, he pried open one marked “confidential” and took out an envelope.

He used his phone's camera to photograph each page inside before resealing the envelope and locking the box. He would repeat the exercise at least once in the nights that followed, as new sheets arrived at the warehouse from the printing house. Waiting in a car each time were three men, including, the police say, the burglary's mastermind, Ravi Atri.

Mr. Atri saw himself as part criminal, part Robin Hood. He had taken the national medical school entrance exam five times, and ultimately passed, but

INDIA, PAGE 4

## Iran cuts the bluster as problems intensify

Woes at home and abroad force Tehran to tone down its rhetoric and seek talks

BY FARNAZ FASSIHI

In mid-November, Iran dispatched a top official to Beirut to urge Hezbollah to accept a cease-fire with Israel. Around the same time, Iran's U.N. ambassador met with Elon Musk, an overture to President-elect Donald J. Trump's inner circle. And on Friday, it was scheduled to hold talks in Geneva with European countries on a range of issues, including its nuclear program.

All this recent diplomacy is a sharp change in tone from late October, when Iran was preparing to launch a large retaliatory attack on Israel, with a deputy commander of the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps warning, “We have never left an aggression unanswered in 40 years.”

Iran's swing from tough talk to a more conciliatory tone in just a few weeks' time has its roots in developments at home and abroad.

Five Iranian officials, one of them a Revolutionary Guards member, and two former officials said the decision to recalibrate was prompted by Mr. Trump winning the Nov. 5 election, with concerns about an unpredictable leader who, in his first term, pursued a policy of “maximum pressure” on Iran.

But it was also driven by Israel's decimation in Lebanon of Hezbollah — the closest and most important of Iran's militant allies — and by economic crises at home, where the currency has dropped steadily against the dollar and an energy shortage looms.

Taken together, these challenges forced Iran to recalibrate its approach, to one of defusing tensions, the Iranian officials familiar with the planning said. They asked for anonymity because they were not authorized to speak publicly, which could put them in danger.

They said Iran suspended plans to strike Israel following Mr. Trump's election because it did not want to exacerbate

IRAN, PAGE 5

### HEZBOLLAH DEAL ISOLATES HAMAS

Hamas has long believed that it could achieve victory through a wider Middle East conflict. PAGE 4

### MORE MIDEAST CHALLENGES AHEAD

The Lebanon truce was the easiest step. Issues on Hamas and Iran's nuclear program are unresolved. PAGE 5

## The importance of becoming Maria Callas



Angelina Jolie and Pablo Larrain, the director of the film “Maria,” attending a performance of Puccini's “Tosca” at the Metropolitan Opera House in New York on Nov. 13.

## Angelina Jolie returns to the screen as the opera diva after a 3-year hiatus

BY JAVIER C. HERNÁNDEZ

New York's Metropolitan Opera House was awash in pearls and tuxedos on a recent gala evening. Socialites traded political gossip by the bar, and bankers discussed coming vacations in the Maldives.

Then a golden elevator door slid open and a glamorous figure slipped out. Heads turned, cellphones clumsily emerged and people began to talk. Is that really her? What is she doing here? She seems taller in person. Look at those tattoos!

I had invited Angelina Jolie to the Met to see a performance of Puccini's “Tosca” ahead of the release of “Maria,” a new film starring Jolie as opera's defining diva, Maria Callas.

Jolie is one of the most recognizable people on the planet, commanding at-

tention wherever she goes. But her night at the opera got off to a bumpy start. She had a problem with her dress, a black, floor-length Yves Saint Laurent with a velvet cape. (The seamstresses in the Met's costume shop were summoned, but Jolie soldiered on without help.) And when I met her in the foyer, she seemed to be having last-minute doubts about me shadowing her, saying it might spoil the experience.

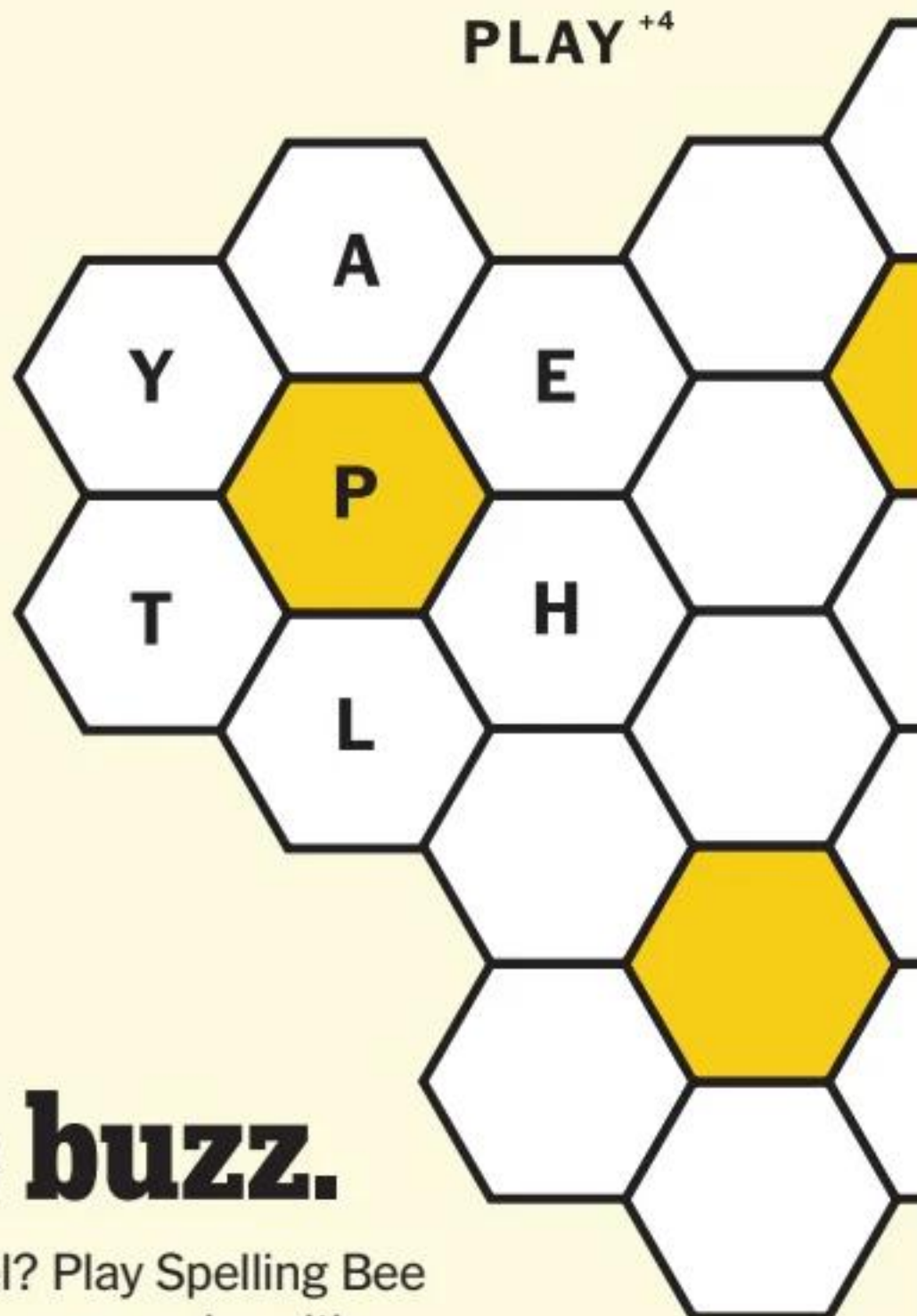
“I just want to enjoy the evening,” she told me. “I want to take it all in.”

Jolie, 49, an actress, director and humanitarian, is one of Hollywood's most powerful and scrutinized figures. Her every move is tracked by the tabloids. (“Angelina Jolie, the blonde bombshell, puts on brave face,” a recent headline said.) Her divorce from Brad Pitt in 2016 is still playing out in court, and their six children have become fodder for the media.

Yet Jolie remains an enigma, a mystery even to those who work with her, carefully crafting her words and image.

“I worked with her for a very long

JOLIE, PAGE 2



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PAGE TWO

The importance of becoming Maria Callas

JOLIE, FROM PAGE 1  
time,” said Pablo Larraín, the director of “Maria,” who joined us for the performance of “Tosca.” “And I still have no idea who she is.”

In Callas, one of the greatest singers of the 20th century and an enduring cultural star, Jolie said she had found a kindred spirit. Called La Divina, Callas, too, was exalted and scorned by critics and fans. Her personal life was examined, interrogated and written about. (She had a long relationship with the shipping magnate Aristotle Onassis.) And she, too, was described as intense and elusive. Callas died in 1977, at 53, with only her housekeeper and butler nearby.

Jolie told me she identified with Callas’s isolation. “Loneliness is not a bad thing,” she said.

“We’re both seen as strong, but actually we’re very vulnerable and human,” she added. “I don’t think either one of us is necessarily comfortable being public.”

“Maria,” which opened on Wednesday in select theaters and goes to Netflix on Dec. 11, is Jolie’s return to the screen after a three-year hiatus. The film has already prompted Oscar chatter around her performance, though she says her aim was to be true to Callas and to produce something that would please opera fans. (She won the supporting actress Academy Award in 2000 for her portrayal of a psychiatric patient in “Girl, Interrupted.”)

To play Callas, Jolie took voice lessons for seven months; learned arias by Puccini, Verdi, Donizetti and Bellini; and studied clips of Callas on YouTube, mastering her smile, her posture, the way she moved her hands, her peculiar way of speaking. While Jolie’s singing voice is rarely audible in the film — it was blended to varying degrees with Callas’s — she grew confident enough to sing before large crowds of extras, at one point filming the mad scene from Donizetti’s “Anna Bolena” on the hallowed stage of Teatro alla Scala in Milan for four hours.



SASHA ARUTYUNOVA FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES



SASHA ARUTYUNOVA FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

That evening at the Met, Jolie kept a distance from the crowd. She descended a grand staircase with the air of a goddess coming to Earth, finding her way to a seat in Box 19, next to Larraín.

“There’s an authenticity here that is beautiful,” she said. “There’s a poetry to it all.”

**LARRAÍN, 48, GREW UP** in Santiago, Chile, immersed in opera. His mother worshiped Callas and played her cassettes in the car.

“I had this ghost of grandiose performance in my head,” he said. “She was a mythical figure.”

As Larraín considered options for the final installment in his trilogy imagining the interior lives of prominent 20th-century women, Callas beckoned. “Jackie” (2016) starred Natalie Portman as Jacqueline Kennedy (who, as it happened, would later go on to marry Onassis, leaving Callas bereft); and in “Spencer” (2021), Kristen Stewart played Princess Diana.

For Callas, Larraín wanted an actress who could create “our Maria,” he said — not simply imitate her. He called Jolie, who had reached out after seeing his earlier work.

“If there’s truth, beauty, emotion, vulnerability and fragility, then you have a character,” he said. “And if you have a character, then you have a movie.”

Working with the screenwriter Steven Knight, Larraín turned the focus to the final days of the singer’s life. In “Maria,” Callas struggles to stage a comeback as she faces the reality of a damaged voice. The film portrays her strained romance with Onassis (Haluk Bilginer); her addiction to sedatives; and her difficult childhood (born in New York to Greek immigrants, she moved to Greece with her mother and sister in 1937, when she was 13).

Larraín picked music that he loved and felt would connect to the real-life drama of Callas’s life. “This movie is about someone who became the tragedies that she played onstage,” he said.

“Ave Maria” from Verdi’s “Otello” pro-



SASHA ARUTYUNOVA FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

vides a prayer at the film’s start. The melancholy “Vissi d’arte” from “Tosca” accompanies Callas’s final moments.

“Opera,” he said, “is a state of grace.”

**WHEN JOLIE FOUND OUT** that learning to sing opera would be a requirement to play Callas, she panicked. (“You can’t cheat,” Larraín told her.) For years, she had carried the trauma of a boyfriend telling her she had a bad voice and that she should be grateful she had other talents.

“It was nasty, and it was more than once,” she said. “Then I stopped singing.”

She told Larraín that she had “a lot of emotion and pain that I did not feel like letting go.” She was not very familiar with classical music; she had grown up listening to punk bands like the Clash. And she wasn’t sure she had the technique to sing — until that point, she had avoided even “Happy Birthday.”

Larraín brought in the vocal coach Eric Vetro, who started with breathing and posture exercises and helped Jolie

stretch her range and resonance. Jolie thought she had a low voice. But it turned out that, like Callas, she was a soprano.

At her first lesson she cried, overwhelmed by the emotional and physical challenges.

“To find my voice and my breath,” she said, “I had to drop all the things that were protecting me and open up again.”

She gradually learned her first aria — Puccini’s “O mio babbino caro,” familiar to movie fans from the soundtrack of “A Room With a View” — with Callas’s recordings as her lodestar. She listened to Callas’s master classes, gleaning tips on vocal technique. And she studied Italian.

After about three months, Vetro noticed something remarkable: Jolie’s mouth was beginning to move like Callas’s — and she had developed a captivating presence as a singer.

“I looked at her and said, ‘This is going to work,’” Vetro said. “The emotion was coming through her eyes, through her hands and through her voice.”



PAX JOLIE-PITT/NETFLIX



PABLO LARRAÍN/NETFLIX

**Clockwise from top:** Angelina Jolie and the director Pablo Larraín attending a performance of Puccini’s “Tosca” at the Metropolitan Opera House in New York; on the set of “Maria,” which takes place in the last days of the opera star Maria Callas’s life; Jolie as Callas in a scene from the movie; the soprano, Lise DavidSEN, who sang the title role in “Tosca,” with Jolie; and Jolie admiring a portrait of Callas at the opera house.

In the early days of production at a theater in Greece, Jolie was asked to sing on camera for the first time. It was the opening scene of “Maria,” in which she looks directly into the camera and sings “Ave Maria.” She allowed only a few people in the theater, including Larraín and her sons Maddox and Pax, who worked on the film.

Through an earpiece, Jolie listened to Callas; a vocal coach, the soprano Lori Stinson, gestured and mouthed the libretto in the background. Larraín, behind the camera, heard a live mix of Callas and Jolie.

Jolie was dispirited after her first attempt. They did six more takes.

“Something extraordinarily human and truthful was happening,” Larraín said. “I saw someone who was transforming herself.”

With her first aria done, Jolie grew more confident on set as she moved through bel canto classics from operas like Bellini’s “Norma” and “I Puritani.” Stinson, who worked with Jolie on location, sometimes pushed her fist into Jolie’s ribs to get her to open up her body and her mouth.

In the film, Callas’s voice is dominant. But there are hints of Jolie’s in some scenes. A rehearsal of “Anna Bolena” near the end, when Callas’s voice is in decline, is at certain moments about 60 percent Jolie, according to Larraín.

For Jolie, the biggest test came in singing “Piangete voi?” from “Anna Bolena” at La Scala, a temple to opera where Callas rose to fame, appearing in more than two dozen productions. The

aria was one of the most challenging on the list, but it was also Jolie’s favorite. Dressed in a costume that matched Callas’s, with a white headpiece and navy dress, she sang before a crowd of about 500 people.

“It’s like jumping off a cliff,” she said. “There was just nothing I could do but try to give everything I had.”

Singing became therapeutic for Jolie. “It’s very primal to let sound out,” she said. “We lock so much sadness and heaviness into our voices.”

**“Something extraordinarily human and truthful was happening. I saw someone who was transforming herself.”**

It also reconnected her with the memory of mother, Marcheline Bertrand, who sang Rolling Stones hits to Jolie when she was young. Her mother’s death from cancer in 2007, at 56, made Jolie feel she no longer had the luxury of time.

“I don’t want to be comfortable or too relaxed,” she said. “I want to live fully.”

**ON A WINDY AUTUMN** morning, the day of the “Tosca” performance at the Met, I met Jolie in a heavily perfumed suite at the Carlyle hotel, a few blocks from Central Park. She sat with perfect posture, sipping on a peppermint tea.

“This is the most fun I’ve ever had doing press,” she said. “I love the opera, so I’m excited for tonight.”

Larraín had suggested, without offering specifics, that I ask her about “the bull story.” But when I broached the subject, she seemed caught off guard.

“I don’t know if I can share that,” she said. She eventually offered a few details, saying that she had been upset by a bullfight she witnessed when young, and that she often thought about that bull, “this beautiful animal,” in preparing to play Callas.

“It was a big moment in my life — it was something that kind of shaped me, that then I’ve carried,” she said. She stopped herself, saying she would think more about what she wanted to share.

I asked her about the bull again that evening, during an intermission at “Tosca,” saying that it seemed to have deep meaning for her and that the public cared about what informed her artistry. She laughed.

“I’m not telling you,” she said. “I’m not talking about it.”

Was the bull a victim? “No.” A symbol of resilience? “It’s more complicated than that.”

“The bull was the only way I could describe who Maria was to me, to Pablo,” she said, looking at Larraín. “You’re going to have to let this be our little secret. It’s a language between us.”

I had begun to feel a bit like Mandrax, the television interviewer in “Maria” who hounds Callas throughout the film with intrusive questions about her life and career. (Played by Kodi Smit-McPhee, he is named after the pills Callas is taking.)

Larraín said that Jolie, like Callas, knew when to let people in and when to push them out.

“She opens the gate for you to understand and feel what she’s feeling,” he said. “And then, out of nowhere, she’s out. And you cannot enter again. And then you wonder.”

**I HAD BEEN WARNED** before our interview that Jolie did not wish to discuss her personal life.

She and Pitt, with whom she had a romantic partnership for more than a decade, are still wrangling in court, a saga that has been described as the “world’s longest divorce” and that continues to draw attention on gossip sites.

During intermission at the Met, when we were alone in the box, I asked Jolie what it was like to be her in this moment. “I’m feeling a little uncomfortable being so public again,” she said, adding that she preferred the security of hiding inside characters.

She had described her time away from acting as a period of discovery and confrontation with herself. What had she learned?

She broke eye contact and struggled to offer a reply, saying she was concerned about revealing too many truths.

“When you are stripped of so many things that make you feel safe and whole, you really sit with what matters to you and what you want to give every breath in your body for,” she said. “In the end, I found a lot of softness.”

Jolie has said she was dismayed to learn that an artist of Callas’s caliber was asked in interviews about her personal life, including her relationship with Onassis, who married Jackie Kennedy in 1968.

Jolie was particularly bothered by a “60 Minutes” interview that aired in 1974. Mike Wallace asks Callas at one point, “You mean you’re a man-eater?”

At intermission, in between bites of Kind bars, Jolie said she was moved by Callas’s determination in the face of struggles with journalists, impresarios, critics, family and friends. She said she hoped that despite all that, Callas was able to “feel safe to be soft and hopefully eventually rediscover a level of joy.”

Had Jolie found joy again? “I don’t know about that,” she said. “But I hope for it. I hope to find a lightness that I may have lost along the way.”

**WHEN THE FINAL CURTAIN** came down on “Tosca,” around 10 p.m., Jolie smiled and stood up to applaud. She and Larraín, both raised as Catholics, had enjoyed dissecting the staging’s religious imagery. Jolie said she had become fond of the phrase “Tosca’s kiss,” a line uttered by Floria Tosca, the title character, before she kills the police chief Scarpia.

Jolie said she had been particularly affected in the second act, when Tosca sings “Vissi d’arte.”

*I lived for art, I lived for love/I never harmed a living soul.*

In a dressing room backstage, she and Larraín greeted the Met’s music director, Yannick Nézet-Séguin, and Lise DavidSEN, the renowned soprano who sang the title role in “Tosca.”

Nézet-Séguin gave his baton to Larraín. DavidSEN, one of the few true opera stars today, praised Jolie. “You actually sing!” she said.

Jolie smiled and clasped her hands. “You were just transcendent,” Jolie told DavidSEN. “I don’t do what you do.”

On her way out, Jolie stopped to admire a portrait of Callas, who performed only 21 times at the Met, including a final run of “Tosca” with the company in 1965. She asked for a private moment.

“They really got her hands,” she said. “I love that.”

Then she made an impromptu visit to the stage. After a few minutes inspecting the sets and staring into the harsh lights of an empty auditorium, Jolie headed for the exit.

“Very moving,” she said.

Outside, a paparazzo waited near her black Chevrolet, preparing to pounce.

“Smile, Angelina!” he said. “Smile!”

Jolie obliged. Then she got into the car and headed into the Manhattan night.



# World

## For some Irish voters, disillusionment

DUBLIN

In a Dublin neighborhood, many feel the main parties haven't delivered for them

BY MEGAN SPECIA

On the lamp posts in northeast Dublin, campaign posters were stacked one on top of the next, the faces of prominent politicians and newcomers competing for attention in Ireland's general election.

But Janice O'Keeffe, 44, who was collecting a cup of coffee on Thursday morning from a cafe on Sean McDermott Street, said she still hadn't decided how she would vote on Friday. One thing was certain: She was fed up with the establishment.

"They've had 100 years to prove themselves and they haven't done much," she said of Ireland's two main political parties, Fianna Fail and Fine Gael.

The two parties, both of which are broadly center-right, have run the Republic of Ireland for alternating periods since the founding of the modern Irish state in the early 20th century. At the last general election, in 2020, neither won a big enough majority to govern alone. So, along with the Green Party, they formed a coalition that kept out their main opposition: Sinn Fein, which had won the popular vote for the first time.

As Ireland headed to the polls, many voters voiced disillusionment with the government, citing issues like the steep cost of living, health care and immigration.

**"People just want change from that constant perpetuating cycle of government saying they are going to do things, and then not."**

Despite that, the duopoly of Fianna Fail and Fine Gael was expected to hold, partly because neither is willing to enter a coalition with Sinn Fein, a left-wing nationalist party that for decades was ostracized because of its history as the political branch of the Irish Republican Army.

In the last election poll from The Irish Times, Fianna Fail, Fine Gael and Sinn Fein were neck-and-neck, with 21 percent, 20 percent and 19 percent respectively.

In northeast inner-city Dublin, locals say the issues facing voters feel particularly acute. There is vast wealth inequality, with pockets of affluence existing alongside deprivation. A boom in commercial development and an influx of well-paid tech workers from multinational firms lured by Ireland's corporate tax breaks has added to the feeling among some longstanding communities of being left behind.

Then, just over a year ago, the city was left reeling after a knife attack set off a night of rioting and looting. The outbreak of violence, which was stoked by anti-immigrant rhetoric and far-right disinformation, shone a spotlight on deeper societal issues that remain largely unresolved.

Surging demand for housing has overwhelmed limited rental stock, exacerbated by a failure by successive gov-



Campaign posters hanging outside a derelict building in northeast Dublin, above. The area is feeling the effects of wealth inequality and other key issues in the election. Left, Sinn Fein supporters are hoping their party wins over disillusioned voters.



PHOTOGRAPHS BY PAULO NUNES DOS SANTOS FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

ernments to invest in public housing. And as the number of new immigrants reached its highest level this year since 2007, a fault line has grown in Irish society and toxic narratives have gained a foothold, experts say.

"There is this real polarization at the moment, and our focus has to be: How do we help these kids growing up here?" said Jonathan Dowling, 38, a youth work leader at Belvedere Youth Club in the north inner-city. "I don't tell people, 'Don't sell drugs,' or 'Don't commit crime' or 'Don't be racist,'" he said. "We create a platform for them to see that there is right, there is wrong and here's your opportunity, and it's down to them to make a decision."

Dean Murray, 26, another youth worker, said there were often negative stereotypes about the area, where he

also grew up, but that the community was tight-knit.

"Most people from here love it," he said. For most of his peers, the biggest issues were the cost of groceries and lack of housing, he said, adding, "I think people just want change from that constant perpetuating cycle of government saying they are going to do things, and then not."

The range of proposed solutions to Ireland's issues is reflected by the candidates vying for Dublin Central constituency's four seats. There are the established candidates from the center-right parties, along with Mary Lou McDonald, the leader of Sinn Fein; progressive left candidates; an anti-immigration candidate; and even Gerry Hutch, a man prosecutors have described in court as the head of a crime family.

On Wednesday, Gary Gannon, a center-left Social Democrat, was knocking on doors in the fading evening light in a final push for votes. He has represented this Dublin constituency since 2020. Concerns about housing have been a major theme for constituents, he said, but he felt the emphasis on immigration concerns had lessened since last year.

"What breaks down fear is connection," he said. "The far-right agitators who have built their name on immigration, people realized once they stopped talking about immigration, they started talking about lessening reproductive rights, and attacks on L.G.B.T. people, and people realized that doesn't resonate with them."

He said the city needs "strong legislators," not just someone to give voice to grievances. "But it can be a bit of a harder sell to say, 'I'm not just going to speak to your anger, I am going to work to resolve it,' because that becomes a long process," he acknowledged.

A short walk away in the East Wall neighborhood, Malachy Steenson, a right-wing nationalist candidate running on an anti-immigration platform, offered a decidedly different vision as he knocked on doors. Mr. Steenson said traditional media had overlooked the importance of immigration to voters in neighborhoods like East Wall, adding, "Our obligation is to our own."

Adrienne McGuinness, 55, and Dawn Everard, 54, were canvassing for him and said they became politically active two years ago in frustration over the

state housing asylum seekers.

"We pay taxes, we all work, and then everything feels like it's getting dumped on us," Ms. Everard said. Ms. Guinness added, "We definitely are forgotten."

Some nationalist and anti-immigration candidates may win seats, said Gail McElroy, a professor of politics at Trinity College Dublin. "It will be a big issue in certain local constituencies where there are plans to provide accommodation for large numbers of asylum seekers," she said, adding, "The mainstream parties are kind of avoiding it," focusing attention instead on the economy.

Sinn Fein is hoping that those disillusioned with the status quo may turn to them. After a surge in support in 2020, the party had been expected to perform well at this election, but its polling numbers have sagged during the second half of this year, thanks in part to internal party scandals.

On Thursday, Ms. McDonald, the party's leader, appealed to people who might have traditionally steered away from the party to "lend" their support in order to challenge the two main parties.

"If you want a change of government, vote for Sinn Fein," she said, standing in front of government buildings.

Despite the disillusionment with establishment parties, the country's form of proportional representation that uses ranked voting insulates it from the wild swings seen in other democracies, Professor McElroy said. As a result, she said, "The system rewards those with less extreme positions."

## Psychedelics on mug hint at Egypt's ancient rites

BY ALEXANDER NAZARYAN

Something in the printout caught Branko van Oppen de Ruiter's eye. He was at home in the Netherlands, working remotely for his new employer, the Tampa Museum of Art, which had named him a curator of Greek and Roman exhibits. The coronavirus had delayed his move to Florida, so he did what he could, studying the museum's collections from afar.

That was when he noticed, on a list of the museum's holdings, a cup from the second century B.C. bearing the face of Bes, a notoriously ugly ancient Egyptian god who was fond of revelry. There was an identical cup in the Allard Pierson museum of antiquities in Amsterdam, where Dr. van Oppen previously worked. "That fascinated me," he said in an interview.

Archaeologists and chemists analyzed the mug and found a big surprise: It contained traces of hallucinogenic plants. As they and Dr. van Oppen wrote in November in Scientific Reports, the mug offered the first chemical evidence that ancient Egyptians ingested hallucinogenic substances, possibly as part of a fertility rite.

The findings add to a growing body of evidence that civilizations in and around the Mediterranean region were just as aware of hallucinogens' unique properties as their Mesoamerican counterparts. Recent studies have found that the Greeks and Romans may have also ingested plants with psychedelic properties, either to reach elevated spiritual states or as part of medical treatment.

In ancient Egyptian lore, the god Bes was responsible for fertility and had a penchant for mischief. "He's a beer drinker and a hell-raiser," a demon who just might answer a supplicant's prayers, Dr. van Oppen said. "There are so many contradictions embodied in Bes."



TANASI ET AL., SCIENTIFIC REPORTS 2024

The "Bes" mug at the Tampa Museum of Art in Florida was found to contain traces of hallucinogens, alcohol and bodily fluids and was most likely used in rituals.

There are about 15 identical Bes cups in museum collections around the world, each one showing the god's face on the body of the vessel. Such objects, made from molds, may have had widespread use in ancient societies, including connection to rituals, experts said.

"There's been a great deal of speculation about the Bes vases and what they were used for," said Dr. Bob Bianchi, who is chief curator of the Ancient Egyptian Museum in Tokyo and was not involved in the research. He said it was "plausible" that the Egyptians used the mugs for psychedelic rituals.

Egyptians were fond of beer, and written evidence suggests they were aware that some plants had hallucinogenic properties. But never before has there been evidence that Egyptians ingested those plants.

After Dr. van Oppen flagged the Bes cup, the news reached Davide Tanasi, a digital archaeologist at the University of South Florida, also in Tampa. Dr. Tanasi and his colleagues used chemical and genetic methods to identify organic residue that had been absorbed by the ceramic vessel.

That analysis yielded evidence of two plants known to have hallucinogenic properties: Syrian rue and the blue water lily. The Bes mug also showed traces of "a fermented alcoholic liquid derived from fruit" and flavored with pine nuts, honey and licorice.

Most striking of all to Dr. Tanasi was the presence of several human bodily fluids, including breast milk and blood. Their presence "really shows you that this is a magical potion," he said, as opposed to a more narrowly medicinal one.

They also found traces of African spider flower, which some ancient societies believed could help a woman's fertility and labor. But African spider flower and Syrian rue can also cause abortions.

Drs. Tanasi and van Oppen both believe that the Bes mug played a role in "incubation" rituals, in which people — most likely women hoping to become pregnant — would have gone to a priest and drunk from the mug, which has a volume of 125 milliliters, or about three shots. They could have then experienced vivid visions before falling asleep.

## Chinese women mobilize over subpar sanitary pads

BEIJING

Online campaign prompts major manufacturers to issue public apologies

BY VIVIAN WANG

When Sabrina Wang, a Chinese university student, saw an online post that claimed that manufacturers of sanitary pads had been cheating women, selling them pads that were significantly shorter than advertised, she decided to measure her own. She was shocked to find that all three brands she had at home were shorter than labeled, by as much as 17 percent.

"If I had issues when using them, I'd wonder if it was that I had gone too long without changing them," Ms. Wang, 22, said. "It was only after everyone pointed it out that I realized it was a manufacturing problem."

She wrote her own post, urging other women to lobby for stricter oversight of pad makers. "Manufacturers think we can't go without their products because of our everyday physiological needs, so they dare to be so arrogant," she said in an interview. "It's a lack of respect."

Ms. Wang was joining a chorus of voices in China that in recent weeks have demanded greater accountability from sanitary pad manufacturers and government regulators — and, more broadly, greater consideration of women.

Criticism of the lengths of pads quickly expanded to scrutiny of their

quality and price. From there, the conversation branched out to topics like inadequate sex education, body shaming and the lack of female corporate leaders.

Women have called for boycotts of brands they deem to be of subpar quality, and shared guides to making reusable pads at home. Dozens of hashtags about the topic, such as "black-hearted pads" and "Is it so hard for sanitary pad producers to meet women's needs?" have trended online.

The backlash prompted one major manufacturer to pull all its products from the e-commerce platform Taobao, promising to improve them. State media outlets have denounced "deep-seated problems" in the industry. And a government-backed trade association promised to take public comments into account when formulating new regulations for sanitary products.

The uproar is the latest example of how discussions of gender inequality have become increasingly common in China, even as the ruling Communist Party has worked to silence civil society and independent speech. Though the police have targeted high-profile feminist activists and organizations, a more nascent and general awareness of gender discrimination, often spread online by young women, has proved harder to stamp out.

Menstruation, in particular, has become a popular rallying topic. During the Covid pandemic, many women criticized the lack of sanitary pads for medical staff members.

China's high-speed rail agency did not sell pads on trains until an online pressure campaign in 2022 prompted some routes to begin stocking them.



WENDY WU/SOUTH CHINA MORNING POST, VIA GETTY IMAGES

Feminine hygiene products in a convenience store in Beijing. Chinese women have called for boycotts of certain brands and shared guides to making reusable pads at home.

The latest campaign began in November, when people on Xiaohongshu, an Instagram-like platform popular with female users, posted videos showing themselves measuring their sanitary pads. They urged other women to follow suit.

When women complained to the manufacturers' customer service representatives about their findings, some initial responses were dismissive, fueling further outrage. A representative for ABC, a popular brand, told one woman that she didn't have to buy the products if she was dissatisfied.

Other brands noted that Chinese reg-

ulations permit labeling discrepancies within a certain range.

Soon, many women began scrutinizing other details about their pads, such as their chemical content, or advertisements they perceived as sexist. They shared stories about being embarrassed by leaky pads. Others said the government should reimburse the cost of sanitary products through medical insurance.

Some women encouraged others to submit feedback to an industry federation in charge of drafting regulations for sanitary pads, even drafting suggestions to copy and paste, such as increas-

ing random inspections on manufacturers and further restricting formaldehyde as a component.

"The more I read, the angrier I got," said Liu Ye, a 20-year-old student who joined the feedback campaign. "If many people submit opinions, there should be an effect."

Major pad manufacturers soon began issuing apologies. The founder of ABC shared a video in which he bowed to the camera and promised exact adherence to industry standards.

Still, despite the apparent success of the women's protests, there were signs of official wariness toward mass mobilization and feminism. Even as state media outlets chided manufacturers for making low-quality products, they did so mostly from the perspective of protecting consumer rights generally, not women's rights.

Ms. Wang, the university student who shared tips for lobbying regulators on Xiaohongshu, said her post appeared to have been partly censored; others could not see her replies to their comments, and the post's viewership rate suddenly plunged overnight.

Other companies that have adopted advertising campaigns seen as appealing to feminists have backtracked after storms of online criticism from men.

For some women, even if the companies did change, it was too little, too late. Zhang Yanchi, a 23-year-old writer in central China, said she wanted to see female entrepreneurs building their own companies that respected women.

"I am waiting for their pads," she said.

Siyi Zhao contributed research from Beijing, and Joy Dong from Hong Kong.



WORLD

# Thieves see a gold mine in India’s exams

INDIA, FROM PAGE 1

never became a doctor. Instead, he turned to stealing tests to help others.

No job was too small for him and his gang. He had previously had a hand in leaking questions on exams for nursing jobs, banking jobs, teaching jobs and slots at vocational institutes, the police say, and had been jailed at least twice.

The constable exam, his latest quarry, would be taken in February of this year by nearly five million people vying for 60,000 vacancies in the northern state of Uttar Pradesh, Mr. Atri’s home base. A new constable is paid about \$400 a month. But even the lowest-paid government jobs in India are coveted for their stability, and aspirants endure months of grueling study in expensive tuition centers to prepare for the exams that govern hiring.

Mr. Atri offered a leg up. And now, with the constable test in his hands, the race was on. Mr. Atri sent the signal to his vast network of local agents in Uttar Pradesh. They had already booked a big restaurant hall and a lush resort where thousands of his clients would be bused in for a crash course in the answers.

They just had to avoid getting caught.

“If this works, you will get so much money that you will not need to do anything else in your life,” Mr. Atri told one of the warehouse workers he had patiently cultivated to get access to the exam, according to a police report. “And you will also get a government job.”

**A HUGE IMBALANCE**

Mr. Atri and people like him capitalize on what has long been a structural problem in India’s economy: too many educated young people, too few jobs.

India has one of the fastest-expanding economies in the world. But much of that growth comes from the services sector, and it is not generating enough jobs for the country’s huge working-age population. Nearly half of Indians still toil on farms, and a vast majority of private jobs in India are informal.

That makes government jobs highly prized. Last year, 1.3 million people applied for 1,000 slots in the prestigious civil service of the central government.

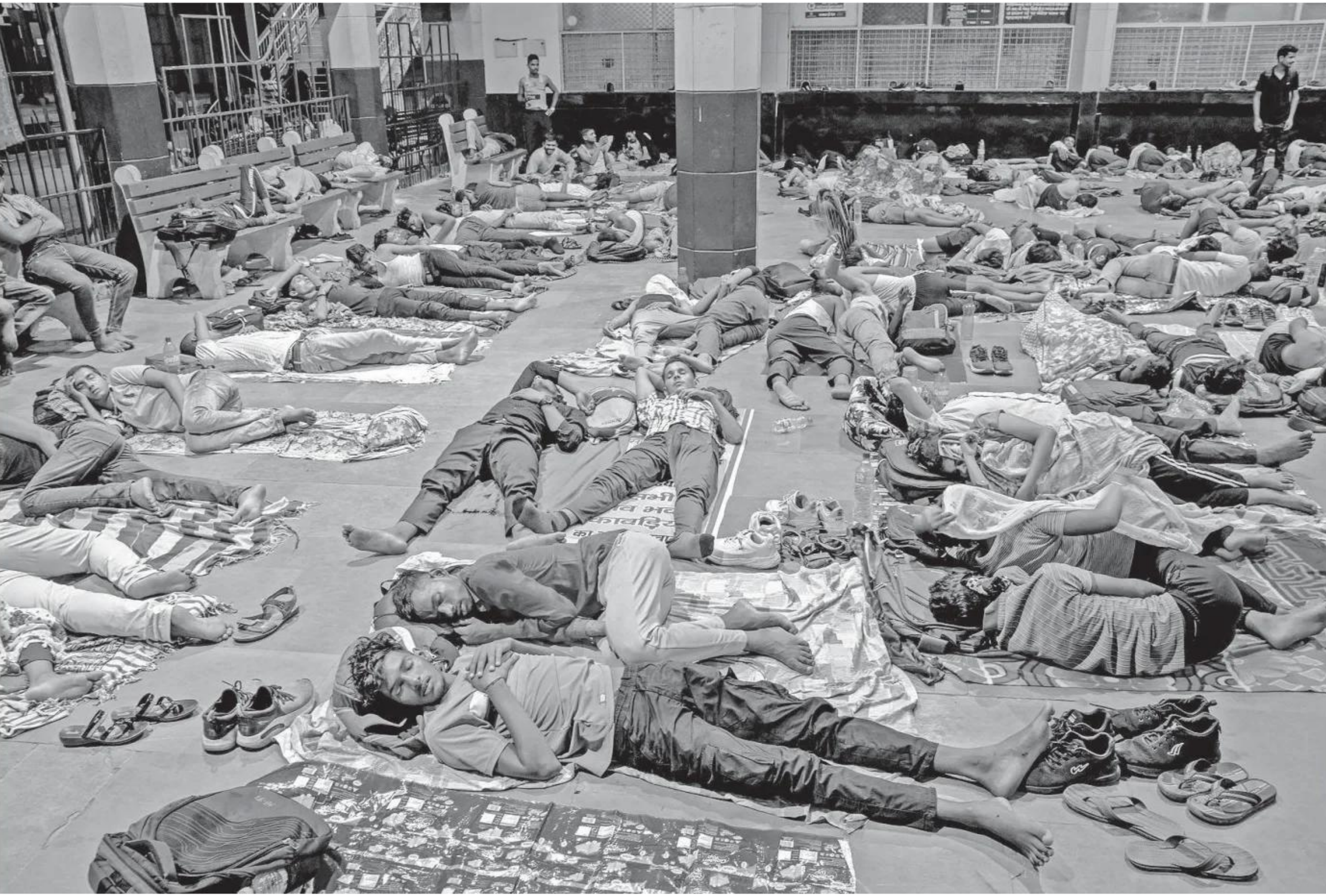
Allotting jobs on the basis of exam results conveys a sense of fairness. But with competition so fierce, the temptation to seek shortcuts can be strong.

Some aspirants, while spending long hours in study groups, also keep an eye out for shadowy figures offering access to exams. They exchange phone numbers with local agents; negotiate tentative prices, often in the hundreds of dollars or more; and pray that the scheme succeeds.

“When four million students prepare for an exam, half of those would also be busy searching for a leaked paper. Not just them — their parents, their grandparents, everyone,” said Brijesh Kumar Singh, a senior police officer in the city of Meerut in Uttar Pradesh who investigates organized crime, with much of his time spent on gangs pursuing exam leaks.

An investigation by one of India’s largest newspapers, The Indian Express, found that more than 40 examinations had been compromised by leaks over the past five years, affecting 14 million aspirants in 15 states.

This year, the national exam for seats in medical schools faced widespread questions after an unusual number of the two million candidates achieved perfect scores. As the government tried to contain the fallout from that case, it canceled a national exam for graduate



Top, settling in for the night at a train station in India’s northern state of Uttar Pradesh. Large numbers of people had traveled to retake a police constable exam. Above, from left: aspiring police constables preparing for the exam in August; and police personnel checking identification details for those waiting to take the exam in the city of Meerut.

school fellowships and junior positions at universities because of a leak.

Protesters camped outside the home of the education minister in New Delhi. The anger grew when two young men who had been preparing for an exam drowned in a basement study center as the streets flooded after overnight rain.

“We are working hard for several years, and rich students are taking advantage of the system by spending money,” Harsh Dubey, 22, who had been attempting to pass the medical school entrance test for four years, said during a protest in Delhi.

**A PYRAMID PLOT**

Mr. Atri once hoped to achieve his dreams the old-fashioned way.

After finishing high school, he packed up his home in Uttar Pradesh and left for Kota, a small town in Rajasthan known across India for its hundreds of test-prep centers generating hundreds of millions of dollars a year.

But as he kept failing the medical school entrance test (after ultimately passing the exam, he did not complete his medical course), he began focusing on the exam industry itself and less on the job that an exam could lead to.

On the legitimate end of the spectrum, in thousands of small towns with their own mini-Kotas, are tutors with large followings, as well as managers of “libraries,” where people can pay for desks and study late into the night.

Mr. Atri at first offered his services as

a “solver” — taking tests for others. Later, he moved into the wholesale business of exam theft, the authorities say.

Around the time he was starting out, an exam scandal in the state of Madhya Pradesh in 2015 made clear just how much money there was to be made, with billions of dollars in kickbacks traced to politicians, criminal gangs and others.

Mr. Singh, the police officer in Meerut, explained the exam breaches as a pyramid model. At the top is the procurer of the leak. Below him are middlemen. They work with agents at the village level, who recruit customers.

Before the constable test heist, Mr. Atri had been introduced to Dr. Mandal, who, the police say, would become his hired thief. His story is similar to Mr.

Atri’s: Even as he was studying for a medical degree, which he completed in 2021, he kept one foot in the lucrative world of exam leaks. Dr. Mandal eventually became known in test-theft circles for his precise box-opening skills. He landed in jail in 2017 for helping to leak a medical exam, police records show.

This year, as Dr. Mandal performed his day job at a health clinic in the state of Bihar, Mr. Atri had him on standby. If Mr. Atri heard about a shipment of question sheets from one of the people he had on retainer along the supply chain, Dr. Mandal would get a call.

**ANOTHER ROUND**

The call for the Ahmedabad job had come, Mr. Atri’s clients had taken the

constable test — and Dr. Mandal wanted his money.

But there was a problem: After the exam had been administered, news got out that the questions had been leaked.

That alone did not mean that Dr. Mandal, who the police say had been promised a final payment of about \$20,000 for stealing the test, would not be compensated. According to his agreement with Mr. Atri, he would be paid as long as the exam results were not canceled. That usually happens only when a leak is found to be widespread.

It was; the results were canceled. Mr. Atri stopped answering Dr. Mandal’s calls.

Mr. Atri’s racket had been busted through routine police work. While investigating another leak case, the police found evidence of the constable test breach.

The police essentially worked their way from the bottom of the pyramid to the top, tracing the leak from a village-level agent up the chain to Mr. Atri and Dr. Mandal.

“We found in their phone the papers for the U.P. constable exam — and when we checked the timing, it was before the exam,” said Mr. Singh, who was the case’s chief investigative officer.

**“Shoes in your hand when you enter. Belts not allowed inside. Jewelry not allowed. Sleeves should not be folded.”**

Officials in Uttar Pradesh said there would be a retest with different questions — this time, a higher-security affair. A repeat leak would be a humiliation.

On the day of the new exam, a police officer named Raghvendra Kumar Mishra had the difficult task of making sure it went well in Meerut. The graveyard of confiscated motorcycles outside his office attested to his usual job — he is in charge of the city’s traffic.

His large office was a makeshift war room. Half a dozen officers watched footage from the 36 centers where the examination was taking place.

At one exam center, police officers checked documents as a line of students made their way under a billboard advertising a hair tonic for balding.

“Only pens allowed,” a police officer kept announcing through a megaphone. “Shoes in your hand when you enter. Belts not allowed inside. Jewelry not allowed. Sleeves should not be folded.”

Mr. Atri and Dr. Mandal, the men who the police say forced millions to retake the constable exam, were both arrested in the case. Mr. Atri now sits in jail, awaiting trial. His lawyers have argued that he was falsely implicated. Dr. Mandal was later granted bail.

Mr. Atri’s father, Gorakh Singh, described him as hard-working, saying he would stay up all night poring over books during his student days. “He may be a wrongdoer to the police,” his father said, “but not to us.”

He said his son’s legal expenses had put the family back by 10 to 15 years. If his son is, indeed, in the wrong, he said, he would prefer that the government finish him off in an “encounter” — an extrajudicial police killing.

“We will weep for 10 days and then will go on with our day-to-day activities,” he said. “Our harassment will be over.”

Pragati K.B. contributed research.

# Israel’s cease-fire deal with Hezbollah isolates Hamas

WASHINGTON

Agreement may remove group’s most important ally from wider conflict

BY JULIAN E. BARNES, ADAM RASGON, AARON BOXERMAN AND RONEN BERGMAN

Hamas has long believed that a wider war in the Middle East would help deliver the organization a victory in its war with Israel.

But the cease-fire deal to stop the fighting between Israel and the Lebanese group Hezbollah has left that strategy in tatters, potentially removing Hamas’s most important ally from the fight, according to U.S. officials.

The agreement is a step forward for the Biden administration, which has tried to contain that wider war and increase pressure on Hamas to make a deal with Israel and release the hostages it holds in Gaza.

But even before the Lebanese cease-fire was announced on Tuesday, Palestinian and U.S. officials said they believed that Hamas’s political leadership was ready to make a deal and abandon the strategy formulated by its leader, Yahya Sinwar, who was killed by Israeli forces in October.

After Hamas attacked Israel on Oct. 7, 2023, Mr. Sinwar focused on trying to defeat Israel by bringing it into a full-scale war with Hezbollah and Iran. U.S. officials said that as long as that strategy appeared to have a chance, Mr. Sinwar would block any cease-fire deal.

But the Israeli offensive against



Palestinian and U.S. officials said they believed Hamas was ready to abandon a strategy devised by its leader, Yahya Sinwar, left, who was killed by Israeli forces in October.

Hezbollah, which devastated that group’s leadership and stocks of long-range weaponry, and now the cease-fire agreement have left Hamas increasingly isolated.

“Hamas is all alone now,” said Tamer Qarmout, a professor of public policy at the Doha Institute for Graduate Studies. “Its position has been seriously weakened.”

And Iran, which supports Hamas and Hezbollah, seems eager to avoid a direct fight with Israel, at least for now. Iran’s air defense systems were devastated in an Israeli attack in October, and after the victory of President-elect Donald J. Trump, the Iranians appear to have called off a reprisal attack.

Hamas has reached a painful cross-

roads more than a year after the Oct. 7 attack, which killed 1,200 people and led to the taking of more than 250 hostages. Israel’s subsequent war in Gaza has killed tens of thousands of Palestinians and left much of the enclave in ruins.

Dozens of Hamas commanders and thousands of its fighters have been killed. Some Palestinians say the group’s attack on Israel provoked the devastating campaign in Gaza. And while Hamas may never be fully eradicated, it no longer fully controls the territory it has administered since 2007.

Yet a cease-fire for Gaza may still be far-off.

Before the Lebanon deal, U.S. and Palestinian officials said Hamas’s political council appeared willing to move to-

ward its own cease-fire if Israel was willing to make compromises, particularly on removing occupying forces from Gaza.

Some American officials say Hamas might drop its demands and move forward on a cease-fire agreement acceptable to Israel’s government.

But Western officials said Israel did not appear to be interested in concessions. Most of the officials interviewed for this article spoke on the condition of anonymity to avoid compromising their work.

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu of Israel seems to be waiting for Mr. Trump to take office before shifting his position on talks with Hamas, according to U.S. officials. While Mr. Trump has urged Israel to “finish up” the war in Gaza, he is unlikely to substantially pressure Mr. Netanyahu or the Israeli military by threatening to withhold military aid.

Western officials say Israel remains skeptical of American and Arab ideas for administering Gaza after the war. Mr. Netanyahu, the officials said, believes that plans to bring in the Palestinian Authority to run Gaza are doomed to failure and that Hamas would quickly reassert control.

American officials also believe that Hamas is angling to remain in power after a cease-fire deal.

The Biden administration’s frustration with Hamas has been growing since late August when its fighters executed a group of hostages, including an American, Hersh Goldberg-Polin. More recently, U.S. officials have pressed Qatar to expel Hamas’s political council from Doha.

Several members of the Hamas political leadership have now left Qatar, relocating to Turkey for the time being.

Before he was killed in late October, Mr. Sinwar tasked the five-member council of officials in Qatar with running the group’s affairs, a senior Hamas official, Mousa Abu Marzouk, said in an interview with Russian television. Mr. Sinwar had steered Hamas since the conception of the Oct. 7 attack and overseen its strategic decision-making throughout the war.

But Mr. Abu Marzouk said that Mr. Sinwar delegated powers to the council because “he was on the front fighting” and having difficulty communicating with Hamas leaders outside Gaza.

Two weeks before his death, Mr. Sinwar sent a message to Hamas’s leaders telling them to prepare for a long fight, according to Osama Hamdan, a senior Hamas official.

**“Hamas is all alone now. Its position has been seriously weakened.”**

But after Mr. Sinwar’s death, reality started to sink in, given Iran’s reluctance to begin a more intense war with Israel and the devastation Hezbollah was suffering in Israel’s offensive.

Hamas has long thought Mr. Netanyahu was demanding its complete surrender, something the group still will not give in to. But some leaders have discussed potential concessions they could make if Israel showed a genuine interest in ending the war and withdrawing from Gaza.

One proposal discussed by some Hamas leaders would permit Israel to maintain a presence — at least temporarily — in the border region between Egypt and Gaza, according to two people familiar with the group’s internal

thinking. Hamas officials have publicly rebuffed any long-term Israeli control of the area, which is known as the Philadelphia Corridor.

In a statement on Wednesday, Hamas praised Hezbollah and said it was committed to efforts to achieve a cease-fire in Gaza, based on parameters it had agreed to previously. Hamas said those parameters included a cease-fire, Israel’s withdrawal, the return of displaced people to northern Gaza and an exchange of Palestinian prisoners for hostages.

Intelligence services of three Middle Eastern countries, including Israel, have determined that Hamas appeared to be more willing to make concessions, according to an official from each of the countries, all three of whom spoke anonymously to discuss sensitive diplomacy. Pressure from Qatar and Turkey, countries that have close ties to the militant group, may have contributed to the change, the officials said.

Qatari and Turkish officials, who spoke with Khalil al-Hayya, Hamas’s top negotiator, over the past month, were left with the impression that the group was willing to be more flexible, the officials said.

Hamas is divided on issues including what role it should have in Gaza after the war and which compromises it should make with Israel.

“The solution to Hamas’s military losses is simpler — there’s a pyramid of command and each commander or soldier can be replaced,” said Salah al-Din al-Awawdeh, an analyst close to the Hamas leadership and a member of the group. “But on the political level, things are far more complicated. There will ultimately need to be elections. There are different factions and balances of power. All this makes it hard to predict.”



# Gaza and Iran challenges still to be faced

NEWS ANALYSIS  
BERLIN

A broader Mideast peace will be difficult to achieve, and nuclear threat remains

BY STEVEN ERLANGER

Difficult as it was to achieve, the cease-fire in Lebanon was the easy part. After helping to strike the deal this past week, President Biden insisted that “peace is possible,” reflecting hopes that the cease-fire between Israel and Hezbollah in Lebanon could be a first step toward ending conflicts across the broader Middle East. But the obstacles to peace beyond Lebanon are formidable, and any regional realignment is likely to fall to Mr. Biden’s successor, Donald J. Trump. Both Israel and Iran, the regional power that backs Hezbollah, wanted an end to the fighting in Lebanon, each for its own reasons. All but decimated, Hezbollah had little alternative.

But that does not mean peace is close in Gaza. Israel and Hamas remain far apart on a cease-fire of their own. Key regional powers like Saudi Arabia still insist on a Palestinian state, a prospect that looks ever more distant. And, not least, looming over any diplomatic effort is the prospect of a nuclear-armed Iran. In his address to Israelis explaining why he had agreed to the Lebanon cease-fire, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu was unequivocal: “The first reason is to focus on the Iranian threat.” Iran will be Mr. Trump’s first order of business in the region. That is not only because it is the linchpin of the threats facing Israel, but also because it continues to enrich uranium that can quickly be turned into weapons, and time is running out to curb production. There are factors that work in Mr. Trump’s favor, however. Iran, which blessed the cease-fire between Israel and Hezbollah, is trying to show the incoming Trump administration that it is again open to a deal over its nuclear program, diplomats and analysts say. With its allies Hezbollah and Hamas badly damaged and its own air defenses shown to be vulnerable, Iran wants to avoid a direct military confrontation with Israel and obtain economic relief from punishing sanctions over its nuclear program, they say.



Shopping at the Grand Bazaar in Tehran. With its economy in shards, Iran would like to avoid further sanctions. Left, a billboard in Tehran depicting Iran’s supreme leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, left, and his predecessor, Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini.

So Tehran has been eager to display a renewed willingness to bargain over its rapidly expanding nuclear enrichment, which is within weeks of being weapons-grade, before Mr. Trump enters office. The Iranians, along with everyone else in the Middle East, are trying to appeal to Mr. Trump’s “deal-making ambitions,” said Sanam Vakil, Middle East director for Chatham House. They are showcasing their compliance in Lebanon and have re-engaged with the Europeans, dangling the potential for a new nuclear deal, she said. “But getting from here to the table and to a deal is a very difficult process, and the clock is ticking,” she said. In his first term, Mr. Trump pulled out of the 2015 nuclear deal with Iran, insisting it wasn’t tough enough. He established a “maximum pressure” policy, re-imposing severe American economic sanctions on Iran and adding more. Iran, its economy in ruinous shape, would like to avoid “maximum pressure 2.0,” said Ali Vaez, director of the Iran Project at the International Crisis Group.

Iran and the European countries that

helped negotiate the 2015 deal and failed to preserve it — Britain, France and Germany — are currently trying to explore the possibility of a new deal, coupled with discussions about how to de-escalate tensions in the larger Middle East, where Iran has sought to expand its Islamic revolution. The hope is to persuade Mr. Trump to refrain from implementing a new set of harsh economic sanctions as soon as he returns to the presidency in January. “Trump may be ready for ‘maximum pressure 2.0,’ but Iran can no longer support ‘maximum resistance 2.0,’” Mr. Vaez said. “They want to avoid another costly showdown with Trump and explore a deal,” he said, thinking that Mr. Trump can deliver the U.S. Congress to support one, as Democratic presidents could not. To that end, Iran’s deputy foreign minister planned to meet European officials in Geneva on Friday, to build on a meeting at the U.N. General Assembly in September. Those same European countries sponsored a recent resolution censoring Iran for not being transparent with the

U.N.’s nuclear watchdog, perhaps to display to Mr. Trump that they, too, are willing to be tougher on Iran. Iran regularly insists that its nuclear program is for purely civilian purposes, but it is enriching uranium to a level that has no civilian use but that is close to military-grade. European officials have low expectations for the meeting on Friday but see it as a way to prepare for Mr. Trump’s presidency and to influence his policy on Iran. **Iran will be Mr. Trump’s first order of business in the region.** The Europeans do not want to be sidelined by any direct U.S.-Iran deal. Since Mr. Trump left the presidency, Iran’s open cooperation with China and especially with Russia has troubled Europeans, whose security is threatened by Russia’s aggression in Ukraine and Mr. Trump’s ambivalence about the NATO alliance. “I have no expectation the meeting will produce concrete results, but it’s an

opportunity for the Europeans and Iran to explore the outlines of a deal, what Iran is willing to put on the table,” said Kelsey Davenport, director for nonproliferation policy at the Arms Control Association. Once Mr. Trump takes office, the time for a new deal will be short, only some six months, she said. That is because the 2015 deal that suspended international sanctions against Iran expires next October. If there is no new deal before then, the Europeans are expected to move in the United Nations to restore them, in what are known as snapback sanctions. “Multilateral maximum pressure,” with U.N. sanctions on top of American ones, “is what Iran really wants to avoid,” Ms. Davenport said. The Iranians “have been very smart to signal early and clearly their willingness to negotiate with Trump.” There are already tensions between those around Mr. Trump favoring maximum pressure and his own stated preference for a deal, she said. “That’s another reason for the Europeans to push Trump to move quickly.” But in the effort for a broader Middle East peace, an Iran nuclear deal is just one, very difficult piece of an intricate puzzle, especially if Mr. Trump pushes to revive a Saudi-Israeli normalization that seemed in the cards before the Gaza war. After the deaths of tens of thousands

of Palestinians, that deal seems farther away than ever, with the Saudis and the leaders of Persian Gulf states pressing for concrete progress toward a Palestinian state, and relations warming with their traditional enemy, Iran. If there is no nuclear deal and American maximum pressure is enhanced by the snapback sanctions, Iran, weakened by its confrontation with Israel, might then choose to go ahead and develop its own nuclear deterrent, analysts said. Such a move would be in violation of Iran’s commitments under the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty and be a challenge for Israel and the United States, which have vowed to prevent Iran from ever getting the bomb. Israel, too, is making its own calculations with a new sense of confidence and trying to ascertain what a re-elected President Trump might be willing to do or allow “to continue to degrade and weaken Iran,” said Hugh Lovatt of the European Council on Foreign Relations. “It’s dealt with two of Iran’s tentacles from its point of view, and they now see Iran as vulnerable and open to attack,” he said. Washington risks overconfidence that “Iran is back in the box” after the damage done by Israeli strikes to Hezbollah, Hamas and its own missile and nuclear facilities, said Ms. Maloney. Even if weakened, “Iran can very much still play the spoiler,” she said.

## Tehran cuts the bluster

IRAN, FROM PAGE 1

bate tensions with the incoming administration, which was lining up cabinet nominees who were hostile to Iran. Mr. Trump’s stated plans to end the wars in the Middle East and Ukraine, however, appealed to Iran, the officials said. Even before the U.S. election, Iran sent word to the Biden administration that contrary to claims by some American intelligence officials, it was not plotting to assassinate Mr. Trump. Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi said on Wednesday that Iran welcomed the truce between Hezbollah and Israel, adding that “Tehran maintains its right to respond to Israel’s airstrikes on Iran last month, but it will take into consideration regional developments such as the cease-fire in Lebanon.” In the view of Sanam Vakil, the Middle East director for Chatham House, a British policy research group, it seems clear that Iran is responding to the coming changes in Washington, as well as the changed domestic and regional geopolitical landscape it now faces. “It all came together, and the shift in tone is about protecting Iran’s interests,” Ms. Vakil said. Iran’s opaque regime, and a governance rife with factional rivalries, can sometimes lead to mixed messages to external audiences and sharp internal differences, though the supreme leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, always has the final word. The hard-line president Ebrahim Raisi died this year and a moderate, Masoud Pezeshkian, was elected in July to replace him, with a mandate to bring some economic and social reform and engage with the West. Mr. Pezeshkian has a lot of power over domestic policy and some influence in foreign affairs. Just days after the U.S. election, Iran’s ambassador to the United Nations, Amir Saeid Iravani, met in New York with Mr. Musk, the billionaire entrepreneur who has Mr. Trump’s ear, to discuss reducing

tensions with the incoming administration. Two Iranian officials described the meeting as promising. In Iran, the reformist and centrist factions rejoiced at the news. But conservatives lashed out, calling the ambassador a traitor, signaling the kind of internal struggle the government faces over engagement with anyone in the orbit of Mr. Trump, who exited the nuclear deal with Iran in 2018, imposed tough sanctions on the country and ordered the killing of a top general, Qasim Suleimani, in 2020. Facing backlash over the meeting with Mr. Musk, Iran’s foreign ministry issued a denial after three days that it had ever taken place. And after a U.N. agency recently censured Iran for preventing international monitoring of its

**“Iran is now applying restraint to give Trump a chance to see whether he can end the Gaza war and contain Netanyahu.”**

nuclear program, Tehran reacted defiantly, saying it was accelerating the program, while also insisting that it “stands ready for productive engagement.” Several senior Iranian officials have publicly said Iran was open to negotiations with the Trump administration on nuclear and regional issues. This itself is a shift from Iran’s position during the first Trump administration that it would not negotiate with Washington. “Iran is now applying restraint to give Trump a chance to see whether he can end the Gaza war and contain Netanyahu,” said Seyed Hossein Mousavian, a former Iranian diplomat and nuclear negotiator who is now a Middle East and nuclear researcher at Princeton University in New Jersey, referring to Israel’s prime minister. “If this happens, it will open the path for more comprehensive negotiations.”

For more than 13 months after Hamas’s Oct. 7, 2023, assault on Israel, Iran and allied forces in Lebanon, Syria, Yemen and Iraq insisted that they would not cease attacks on Israel as long as Israel was at war in Gaza. But Hezbollah’s devastating losses concerned Iran, which exerts considerable influence over the Lebanese group. Iranian media also reported resentment rising among the more than one million displaced Shia Lebanese, who looked to Iran as their protector and patron. In an unusually brazen assessment, Mehdi Afraz, the conservative director of a research center at Baqir al-Olum University, an Islamic institution, said Iran underestimated Israel’s military power. “Our friends from Syria called and said the Lebanese Shia refugees who support Hezbollah are cursing us up and down, first Iran, then others,” he said during a panel discussion at the university. “We are treating war as a joke.” Mr. Khamenei, who has demonstrated pragmatism when survival of the regime seemed at risk, sent a senior adviser, Ali Larijani, a veteran politician, to Beirut in mid-November. Mr. Larijani delivered a message from the ayatollah to Hezbollah leaders, according to two Iranian officials: It was time to accept the cease-fire and end the war, and Iran would help Hezbollah rebuild. Less than 48 hours later, Lebanon announced a breakthrough in negotiations: that Hezbollah had agreed to keep its forces away from the Israeli border, a condition it had previously rejected. At the same time, Iranian officials faced domestic economic and energy crises. The government announced two-hour daily power cuts, inciting public anger and accusations from critics that its regional conflicts were too costly. Mr. Pezeshkian, the president, who has promised to engage with the world to lift sanctions and improve the economy, said in a recent meeting with officials in the energy sector that he needed to “honestly tell the public about the energy situation.” Iran’s energy infrastructure, he said, cannot meet its needs. Tehran said it was sending an experienced diplomat and former nuclear negotiator, Majid Takht-Ravanchi, to Friday’s meeting with officials of Britain, France and Germany, the countries that, along with the United States, sponsored the censure over Iran’s nuclear program. “Without doubt in Iran, among senior officials and ordinary people, there is a real desire to end the tensions with the West and to get along,” Naser Imani, an analyst close to the government, said in a telephone interview from Tehran. “Cooperation with the West is not viewed as defeat, it is seen as transactional diplomacy and can be done from a position of strength.”



Iranian officials say Tehran put pressure on its ally, Hezbollah, to accept a cease-fire.

Leily Nikounazar contributed reporting.

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WORLD

Wielding power from outside the White House

WASHINGTON

Trump’s eldest son enforces loyalty while he builds a business empire

BY KATIE ROGERS

Ivanka and Jared left the White House behind for a life in Miami. Eric is running the family business. Tiffany got married. Barron is a budding strategist at NYU.

Of all the Trump children, no one has stuck closer to their father’s side than Donald Jr., the president-elect’s eldest son.

The 46-year-old Mr. Trump has found political power and personal fortune in stoking the flame of the Make America Great Again movement his father started. He has an array of conservative-focused businesses, including a publishing company and a seven-figure annual podcasting deal. Forbes recently estimated Mr. Trump’s worth — largely built in the wake of his father’s political career after Jan. 6, 2021 — to be around \$50 million.

“He has his businesses. Sometimes people on the outside like Don have more influence than people on the inside.”

For that reason, his associates say, he has no plans to join the administration. But he also understands what his siblings and several first-term administration officials learned the hard way: Trying to serve as a gatekeeper for his father is a politically perilous exercise.

In recent weeks, as the president-elect builds out his administration, his son has served as something of a loyalty scanner. As they review candidates at Mar-a-Lago in Florida, the president-elect is concerned with who looks good and who can deliver a message, people around them say. His son is focused on whether they mean what they are saying, and if they present threats to the MAGA order.

Donald Trump Jr. has championed candidates who not only share the president-elect’s views on policy but have also passed the most important purity test: They support the falsehood that he won the 2020 election and play down his decision to encourage a mob to storm the U.S. Capitol two months later.

In recent appearances, Donald Trump Jr. has made it clear that he believes that everything that has happened since early 2021 happened because true loyalists dug in and kept on believing, watching in the wings as Democrats made a series of strategically fatal decisions on economic and social policy.

“Now you got four years where we know what we’re doing, where we have a chance to start from scratch with people who we know are absolute warriors for the movement,” he said on the conservative activist Charlie Kirk’s podcast



Donald Trump Jr., above, at a campaign rally for his father, President-elect Donald J. Trump. Mr. Trump Jr. has been reviewing candidates for his father’s incoming administration and was instrumental in the choice of Senator JD Vance, right, as running mate.

recently. “Now you’re stuck with that for four years.”

It was Donald Trump Jr. who saw the early threat that Robert F. Kennedy Jr.’s candidacy posed to his father’s campaign, and who, allies say, tried to brainstorm ways to bring him into the fold.

Since Mr. Kennedy was chosen as the nominee for Health and Human Services secretary, Donald Trump Jr. has kept him close, even feeding the notoriously health-conscious Mr. Kennedy a McDonald’s burger aboard his father’s plane and then taking a picture of it.

This is a tactic that Mr. Kirk suggested was akin to a mob strategy: “If you think someone is an informant, you make them take a little drugs,” he suggested during the podcast interview.

“Bobby did have some McDonald’s,” Donald Trump Jr. said. “We definitely had some fun with that one.”

LOYALTY FIRST

This loyalty-first approach explains how and why Matt Gaetz, a fierce Trump defender, was the initial pick for attorney general. (The subject of an investigation involving sex trafficking, Mr. Gaetz pulled himself out of consideration.)

It explains how Sergio Gor, Donald Trump Jr.’s business partner at Winning Team, their conservative publishing company, was selected to lead the White House Personnel Office. And it explains how JD Vance, the vice president-elect, was chosen, as well.

Each choice amounted to a set-it-and-forget-it guarantee, not only for a president who demands fealty but also for a son prepared to enforce his father’s demands.

Donald Trump Jr. declined a request for an interview through a spokesman, but others who are close to him were cleared to speak on his behalf, including Mr. Kirk. “He only weighs in when something is particularly important to him,” Mr. Kirk said, “or where he feels as if there might be something that would not be in his father’s best interest.”

Topics that are most important to him include issues around the Second Amendment to the U.S. Constitution, which protects the right to bear arms, the border, privacy and foreign policy, several allies said, with one prominent example: Donald Trump Jr. was an early champion of Mr. Vance because the two men shared the belief that the



United States should stop the flow of aid to Ukraine.

“He has a real commitment to developing both the policies and the personnel,” said Newt Gingrich, the former House speaker, who was recently a guest on Donald Trump Jr.’s podcast. “He’s a sentinel trying to defend the president and Trumpism from people who would like a job but don’t necessarily have the right credentials to do it.”

This means that other threats, like former Gov. Nikki Haley of South Carolina, a first-term appointee who later fell out of favor for, among other things, criticizing Mr. Trump’s response to the riot at the Capitol, have not fared as well. She is now a figure of mockery for the president-elect’s son. When Ms. Haley criticized Mr. Trump’s cabinet picks, Donald Trump Jr., as he often does, used social media to fire back.

Progressive influencers want what conservatives have

BY SHANE GOLDMACHER AND KEN BENSINGER

Zackory Kirk, an influencer based in Atlanta who goes by the name The Zactivist and has more than 220,000 followers on Instagram, TikTok and other platforms, has been churning out mostly progressive content for more than four years.

It was only in the final stretch of the 2024 election that any real paid opportunities for him emerged from Democrats seeking to increase support for Vice President Kamala Harris, down-ballot candidates and issues such as reproductive justice. Nearly all the money Mr. Kirk made — and it wasn’t that much, he added — came from September to Election Day.

“Up until the end, everything was pretty much free work,” he said.

And since Ms. Harris lost?

“Nothing.”

Now Democrats are facing a reckoning, not just over Ms. Harris’s loss to President-elect Donald J. Trump but also over how the left got so badly outflanked online. The sponsorship spigot that many influencers say was turned on too late is now running dry. And the content creators who embraced Ms. Harris fear falling even further behind their Republican rivals, one viral TikTok post at a time.

Interviews with more than a dozen Democratic content creators reveal a pervasive belief that Republicans have helped incubate a highly organized and well-funded ecosystem of influencers, podcast hosts and other online personalities who successfully amplified and spread pro-Trump content. And the content creators are blaming scattershot and underfunded efforts by Democrats to make an impression in a sphere they said the party as a whole had overlooked for at least a decade.

While many on the left have spent the past few weeks debating whether Ms. Harris should have granted an interview to Joe Rogan, the right-leaning host of the world’s most popular podcast, some progressive influencers are now more interested in building up a Rogan of their own.

They are banding together to create



Influencers and content creators were invited to the Democratic National Convention, above, in August. Some on the left are creating networks to make content year-round.

their own networks to make content year-round and not just in the final months before elections. Their goal is to eventually forge self-sustaining advocacy groups and networks, a left-wing answer to the nonprofit Turning Point USA or the media company The Daily Wire on the right. But first they need buy-in — and cash — from the Democratic Party’s donors and institutions to compete in the new attention economy, where people’s time is the currency.

Exactly how much was spent on the creator space in the election is shrouded in secrecy, with much of the funds routed through nonprofit organizations subject to only minimal disclosure. The Harris campaign did disclose millions of dollars going to firms that work with influencers, but that amounts to less than 1 percent of what was spent overall. The vice president spent tens of millions of dollars more than Mr. Trump on digital advertising, but it was not enough.

“Conservative influencers have year-round support, and those of us on the left have been left to fend for ourselves and it’s not working,” said Leigh McGowan, who goes by iampoliticsgirl and has more than two million followers across various platforms.

Ms. McGowan is a charter member of a new venture called Chorus that was formed in November by a group of influencers who believe the Democratic apparatus has come up far short with social media. It’s the brainchild of a private company, Good Influence, and its goal is to provide resources and guidance to creators and to also identify and amplify new voices.

“Win the culture, win the country. That’s what we believe.”

“We have an obligation to do it because the Democratic Party has been so slow in adapting to the media environment that we’re in right now,” said Brian Tyler Cohen, another inaugural Chorus member and the host of a popular YouTube channel where he once interviewed President Biden.

Although many factors contributed to Mr. Trump’s victory, the steady drumbeat of conservative voices online clearly played a role in shaping popular opinion. In one signal of their influence, Dana White, the chief executive of the

Ultimate Fighting Championship, took the stage at Mr. Trump’s election night party and went through a credit list: “I want to thank the Nelk Boys, Adin Ross, Theo Von, Bussin’ With The Boys and last but not least the mighty and powerful Joe Rogan.”

Mr. Trump sat for interviews with each of them in the final months, and while they might not be household names, they have tremendous reach online — particularly with young men and infrequent voters, demographics the Trump campaign focused on heavily.

Podcasters and TikTok stars constitute a big part of what progressive observers see as a winning formula for Republicans. Conservative groups work to identify and grow talent, supporting them until they can be financially solvent on their own.

“We made long-term investments in creators and in influential voices that we believe will be the opinion shapers of tomorrow,” said Charlie Kirk, the executive director of Turning Point USA, the conservative nonprofit and political action committee that many on the Democratic side see as a model.

Turning Point has supported or incubated roughly 350 right-wing influencers

over the years, the group said, including some of the biggest names on the right, such as Benny Johnson, Candace Owens and Alex Clark. One past influencer, Anna Paulina Luna, is now a member of Congress from Florida.

“Win the culture, win the country,” Mr. Kirk said. “That’s what we believe.”

David Pakman, who has a progressive YouTube channel with 2.7 million subscribers and is part of the new Chorus venture, has looked enviously upon the Turning Point network. “We just don’t have anything like it at all on the left,” he said.

He was among a small group of influencers invited to meet with Ms. Harris for an off-record meet-and-greet last March. But he had to pay his own way there and for his lodging.

“I think I got a tea bag and some hotel water,” he recalled. Now he worries that there’s no plan from the party to keep supporters engaged. He has complained on his program since the election that he and other Democratic influencers were seeing “record” numbers of paid subscribers canceling, including the shrinking of his own YouTube subscriber base. He said Democrats were doing exactly what they should not be: “Our instinct is

“If Nikki Haley really wants a cabinet filled with neocon warmongers to satisfy the billionaire donors that control her, she should try running for President and winning herself,” he wrote. “Oh wait, I forgot she already tried that and lost in a landslide.”

EVOLVING RELATIONSHIP

For a son who at times has taken pains to differentiate himself from his father, on style if not substance, he has remarked to associates that, as it turns out, he might be more like his father than he initially realized.

He has long embraced his father’s grievance-based brand of politics. He is ubiquitous at Trump rallies, on social media and on conservative podcasts, serving as a megaphone for Mr. Trump’s base.

“He’s on the outside. He has his businesses,” Mr. Gor said. “Sometimes people on the outside like Don have more influence than people on the inside.”

It is a striking evolution for a father-son relationship that has at times been distant and tense.

He is still careful not to ever try to eclipse his father, a half-dozen associates said, but he has since proved himself and his value to Mr. Trump. He has turned his efforts to identifying and cultivating a new generation of MAGA-loyal politicians, including Mr. Vance and several new Republican senators in the next Congress, like Bernie Moreno of Ohio, Tim Sheehy of Montana, and Jim Banks of Indiana.

“If you have a son who is smart, hard-working and wants to help you,” Mr. Gingrich said, “you sort of have to think, why wouldn’t you listen to him on occasion?”

Embracing a movement fueled by grievances has also been personally enriching. Helping his father crystallize a political movement led to lucrative projects like a podcast deal with the conservative site Rumble, which an adviser said was worth a yearly salary of seven figures before advertising.

He founded a hunting magazine — “a lifestyle brand for nonconformists” — called Field Ethos. He is building a conservative media platform, called MxM. He hobnobs with donors, and announced at a recent summit that he was joining the venture capital firm 1789 Capital. The firm is run by Omeed Malik, a financier who has long promoted the idea of a “parallel economy” fueled by American conservative consumers.

Mr. Gor said in an interview that Winning Team, their publishing company, had about 15 authors and had published three books by the president-elect.

So Donald Trump Jr. has no plans to leave that behind for a life inside the White House gates, where aides who veer too close to the inner workings of the Oval often find themselves on the outs.

“The midterms will be here before you know it, and he’s looking ahead on how to build these majorities in the House and Senate,” Mr. Gor said. “He can explain some policy positions better than some elected individuals, and that’s why people trust him.”

the opposite of what the right does.”

In December, Turning Point will hold its annual America Fest in Phoenix, with the former Fox News host Tucker Carlson, Donald Trump Jr. and Matt Gaetz, the president-elect’s withdrawn pick for attorney general, among the listed speakers. They will be joined at the event by a host of right-wing influencers, including Brandon Tatum and Ms. Clark, a health and lifestyle podcaster who got started in 2019 with a conservative pop culture show in the Turning Point network.

That cross-pollination gives credence and credibility in both directions — validating the politicians to the creators’ audiences and the creators to their audiences.

“The right has been building an influencer ecosystem intentionally as infrastructure,” said Emily Amick, a former counsel to Senator Chuck Schumer who posts to her nearly 200,000 followers on Instagram as @emilyinyourphone and is not involved in Chorus. She recalled a conservative colleague telling her years ago that the right would be building its own apparatus. “You guys have Hollywood and we knew we had to build our own,” she recalled the person saying.

Stuart Perelmuter, the chief executive of Good Influence, said he’d been contemplating Chorus for some time, but Ms. Harris’s defeat had crystallized the urgency.

“We got killed in alternative media,” said Mr. Perelmuter, whose firm finds political and advocacy opportunities for creators and was paid more than \$500,000 by the Harris campaign and other Democratic committees during the election. “Republicans have been investing in that space for years. And on the left we have treated creators who are not in legacy media as gig workers.”

Within a week of the election, he held a call to organize Chorus with his colleague Josh Cook, a former digital strategist for Barack Obama, as well as Mr. Cohen, Zackory Kirk and others. He likens Chorus, which will have nonprofit and for-profit arms, to a television newsroom, where editors, producers, researchers and fact-checkers support the creation of content year-round and not just when there’s an election coming.



# A cop’s son became a one-man crime wave

To feed his drug addiction, David Andino stole from a New York store every day

BY MICHAEL WILSON

The shoplifter knew the geography of the big gleaming Target store in New York City as well as he knew his dingy little \$20-a-week room uptown.

He popped through the sliding front door, where a security guard stood posted. No sense trying to sneak in — the guards all knew him on sight. In his head, a timer was ticking, like a shot clock. Ninety seconds. That was how long it would take for the police to respond to the 911 call the security guard would be making right now.

He hurried past the guard to get to the pharmacy area downstairs. The nearest route down was the escalator going up.

The shoplifter, David Andino, clambered down that escalator, hurtling past shoppers heading up.

Andino scooped what he could into a laundry bag, seeking out the brands he knew he could easily sell. Aveeno lotion, Cetaphil cleanser, CeraVe moisturizer. Sensodyne toothpaste, Crest White Strips.

Ninety seconds.

He raced back up the escalator, past the guard, and back onto Greenwich Street and into the nearby Chambers Street subway station.

He boarded an uptown train, and the doors closed behind him. Success. Tomorrow, he would be back.

It was 2022. Day after day, he stole from that Target store in the TriBeCa neighborhood. The police arrived, too late. As he stole more and more, day after day, Andino became a one-man crime wave in the Police Department’s First Precinct in Lower Manhattan.

Eventually, officers changed tactics. They started lying in wait for Andino outside his favorite Target. Watching.

Another search was taking place across the Hudson River in New Jersey. A woman, retired from the Police Department after 20 years in rough sections of the Bronx, spent her mornings searching her computer for some sign of him in the city’s jails, or worse.

Her name was Elizabeth Velazquez. She was David Andino’s mother.

**A STUBBORN PROBLEM**

You have probably never laid eyes on David Andino. But you have felt, with frustration, the impact of his actions in the shaving cream and toothpaste aisles of your pharmacy, where everything is now locked behind plastic. The barriers are in response, store owners say, to rampant theft.

That claim has been questioned as overly broad — an easy scapegoat for deeper challenges facing the retail industry. Shoplifting, experts observe, has actually declined in the United States.

But in New York City, it remains a stubborn daily reality. Security guards are trained not to lay hands on a person stealing, a fact that many thieves know. And those who are caught are rarely, if ever, jailed; instead they are given desk-appearance tickets for their misdemeanor offenses. They can rack these tickets up without practical consequence, until someone begins tracking one individual thief and adding his thefts until they pass \$1,000 in value, the threshold for felony grand larceny.

Before he was one of the busiest shoplifters in the city, Andino was living in Harlem, and his days revolved around feeding the drug habit that had knocked him out of college and far off course. Cocaine and heroin.

He panhandled on the subway, he said in an interview, but it wasn’t enough. He needed a new hustle.

A friend, Brian, said, “You want to make \$20 real quick? We go into Target and take Sensodyne.”

Target seemed huge, a shiny fortress of glass and steel on Greenwich Street in TriBeCa, just blocks from the World Trade Center.

He went along, very afraid, certain he’d be in a jail cell in no time at all.

The two men entered the store and made their way downstairs to the pharmacy. They loaded the bag until Andino could barely lift it. They went upstairs, where he was sure security people were following him.

But they weren’t.

He hurried to the subway with his heavy bag, shocked at how easy that was. They went back, sometimes carrying disguises, donning jackets and caps after leaving the store so they would look different from whatever description the police might have.

One day, Andino went to Target alone, no partner. And it still worked.

It quickly became routine, a part of his day, like a favorite coffee cart or deli.

Target employees found him stealing, and he would apologize even as he kept loading his bag. Andino learned quickly that guards weren’t allowed to physically stop him. It was against policy.

The security guards began to recognize him. “You got a minute and a half,” one guard told him one day, as if daring him.

Sometimes Andino spoke back. “You do what you do, and I’ll do what I do, and we’ll see what happens,” he’d say. “It’s not like it’s your stuff. I’m not going to your house and stealing from you.”

**WORRIED MOM**

Elizabeth Velazquez graduated from high school 19 and pregnant. David was born the following October. His father



left and drifted into addiction. He later died after using an infected needle.

Velazquez rebounded and went to college. She held fast to a dream job she’d wanted since she was about 8, growing up in the rough 1980s South Bronx. “I always wanted to be a cop,” she said. “I just wanted to be out there and make sure people are taken care of.”

She joined the Police Department in 1998. David was 9 years old, a happy child with a bright smile and a pet dog, Phoebe. If she thought her job would excite her son, she was wrong. “My son had a lot of nightmares,” she said. “He thought I was going to die. He’d come jump in my bed.”

She worked at ground zero after Sept. 11, digging for bodies. “It was bad,” she said. “I came home with a gray uniform.”

David attended a Catholic elementary school until the family left the Bronx and moved to the suburbs of Warwick, N.Y. “He started smoking weed,” she recalled. “I started noticing little things.” She took out a second mortgage and sent David to the New York Military Academy in Cornwall, N.Y., hoping the discipline would curb any trouble before it really began.

It seemed to work, and David graduated and enrolled at Penn State’s rural Hazleton campus in northeastern Pennsylvania, in the foothills of the Pocono Mountains. He pitched for the baseball team and proudly wore his team’s ring.

She went to work patrolling the streets of the Bronx every day, seeing streets lined with people in the throes of drug addiction, and she thanked God her son had dodged that fate.

**“SKY CRACKED OPEN”**

After arriving at Hazleton, Andino began selling OxyContin. It was easy money. He’d buy pills for \$4 apiece and sell them to his fellow students for \$30.

Curious, he tried one and quickly became hooked. He loved the feeling it gave him.

After two years, he crashed and dropped out.

He moved back home. Velazquez had given birth to a daughter while he was in high school; she was just 4. His mother worried about his impact on the girl, but he felt like his mother was overreacting. “She became too strict,” he said. “She cut me off. I became more desperate. I sold my baseball ring.”

Like millions of other prescription-drug abusers, he became unable to afford his habit, and switched to a cheaper high: heroin.

“It was like the sky cracked open and God grabbed me,” he said. “That’s how it feels.”

He’d always been so neat and clean growing up. Now he was a mess — his clothes, his hair, his room.

Velazquez felt trapped, afraid of the possible fallout at work. “I couldn’t tell the job my son was an addict,” she said. She noticed some of her jewelry had gone missing. Blank checks had been removed from her checkbook.

Then, in 2010, came an anonymous note stuck to her door: “It said, ‘What you suspected about your son — you’re right. He is on heroin,’” she recalled reading.

She demanded he take a urine test on the spot. He refused. “Somebody must have heard the commotion,” she said. “The cops came.”

That was a tipping point. “I need you out of here,” she told him.

Andino ended up in Harlem, couch surfing, crashing wherever. Haunted by the story of how his father died, he only used clean needles from a needle exchange. It provided everything he needed. Cooker, cotton, needles, tourniquet.

For a while, he stole beer from a Target store on the Upper West Side and sold it to bodegas.

He called home when he needed cash. He taught his mother how to wire money through Western Union. She would give the store a password that



Clockwise from above: David Andino’s favorite Target store, where many products have been placed behind plastic; Elizabeth Velazquez, Mr. Andino’s mother; a family photograph of Mr. Andino at military academy; and Ms. Velazquez with her son at her graduation from the police academy when he was 9.



To be a police officer and an addict’s mother was to live in a lonely, deeply uncomfortable place.

Andino would need to recite to pick up the cash.

Something easy to remember: their pet dog.

“Phoebe,” he’d say in the Western Union outlet, collect his money and hurry to his drug dealer.

Months passed since he had left home. Then years. To be a police officer and an addict’s mother was to live in a lonely, deeply uncomfortable place.

She’d wake up every morning and open the inmate locator on the city’s jails website. Mostly no hits, but every now and then, his name would appear.

If he wasn’t in jail, she had one more website to check: the National Missing and Unidentified Persons System, or NamUs, a nationwide site for unidentified or unclaimed bodies in medical examiners’ custody.

“I know it’s a little dark,” she said.

**A SHOPLIFTER’S PRIME**

In the prime of his shoplifting, Andino was stealing every morning and many evenings. He had a regular buyer on West 116th Street, he said, who resold his stolen items to customers.

They loved the smell-goods, the cos-

metics, the makeup. Clothes, detergents, Downy Unstoppables. Fifty of those would bring him \$15. Seconds of work. He could sound like a stock boy as he described the store. Peppermint soaps. Collagen — he could sell all the collagen he could carry.

He had many other paying customers, too. Families. They wanted Ninja blenders, espresso machines, air fryers. The whole neighborhood knew him. “I’m having a big barbecue,” someone would tell him.

He’d go to a Trader Joe’s on Broadway and West 72nd Street and steal food — 20 or 40 steaks in about the time it takes to read this sentence. The store’s perpetually long line, winding through the aisles, made his work easier. “They’re all covering me,” he realized. He grabbed sockeye salmon, lamb chops, racks of ribs. He stole bacon to sell to the breakfast carts in Harlem.

He lived in a rented room with his girlfriend, who was also a thief. She liked Duane Reade.

He warned that she should diversify. “You can’t keep going in the same store the same way at the same time,” he told her.

And yet, he ignored his own advice. Yes, he spread his stealing around several stores, but he always came back to the same Target outlet in TriBeCa.

It was sometime in 2023 when a new manager at the store caught him stealing. “I’m sorry, I’m sorry,” he said, his usual routine, as he kept sweeping items into his bag.

She was different. “She was like, ‘Him,’” he said. “‘He comes every day. We want him.’”

On Oct. 6, 2023, a police officer arrived and handed Andino a Target trespass notice. The document formally banned him, under the threat of arrest, from entering the store. He ignored it.

October turned to November. The new store manager was watching, quietly keeping a list of dates and items stolen. When the amount of the items passed \$1,000, he could be charged with felony grand larceny instead of petit larceny, a misdemeanor.

That day arrived on Nov. 12. It seemed like officers were waiting for him at the top of the escalator.

**STORES CRACK DOWN**

In September 2023, Target closed a store in East Harlem, blaming shoplifting losses. It had been there 13 years, and was one of several stores the chain closed at the same time. Just blocks away, Andino was reselling stolen Target merchandise on East 116th Street.

That same year, the National Retail Federation released a report dedicated to “organized retail crime,” as it is known in the industry. It said that in 2022, retail theft resulted in industry losses of \$112.1 billion, compared with \$93.9 billion the previous year.

A flowchart tracked the ways that thieves were known to operate. Some stole from stores and fenced the goods to be shipped overseas. Some resold the goods to “local business (e.g., bodega).”

It was Andino’s playbook. Wittingly or not, he had flowed into the streams of national shoplifting patterns. His 90-second strategy, perfected over months, was actually common practice.

The industry has a name for people like Andino: boosters.

Boosters are often “individuals with economic or social vulnerabilities such as the homeless or those with substance issues,” the industry report read.

Target announced tougher policies. In July, it said that the threshold for security guards to “stop” a theft had dropped from \$100 worth of stolen goods to \$50, according to Bloomberg. It is unclear what a “stop” entailed, as employees are still told not to physically intervene in a shoplifting.

Target, like many stores, has increased the amount of goods it keeps behind locked plastic cases in recent months.

“To be clear, we do not like locking up product,” Brian Cornell, the CEO of Target, told Yahoo Finance. “But we like running stores, and we want to keep our stores open. We want to make sure they’re safe.”

**“LAST HURRAH”**

Elizabeth Velazquez arrived at Ulster County Correctional Facility on a week-end morning last month. It would be the first time she had been in the same room with Andino since 2016, when she was still a police officer.

Sitting in the prison’s large visitation room, with barred windows offering limited views of the trees and mountains outside, she worried about what he would look like.

He came in, and his eyes found her table. He didn’t look as bad as she feared. He had put on weight. But his teeth were a wreck, broken in the front.

Velazquez hugged him and wouldn’t let go. She cried and said, “You look so good,” over and over. “I love you so much. Please come home.”

They sat. She told Andino he needed an inpatient facility to kick drugs for good. No more street life. He said he needed to go to Harlem to find his girlfriend and bring her with him.

“You can’t go back there,” she told him. “You can’t fix someone else until you fix yourself.” She watched his face.

“OK, OK,” he repeated, but to her, it seemed like he was just saying that.

A week later, Andino, now 35, sat down in that same room, now all but empty, for an interview. He spoke of his addiction and his stealing. He said he regretted that life, what it cost him. He didn’t see Target as a real victim. It was the same thing he used to tell the employees there: It wasn’t like he was stealing from their homes.

So how do you stop people from shoplifting?

“You’d have to get drugs out of the picture,” he said. But more practically: “Bigger security guards. I see a big security guard, I don’t go in.”

He has a parole hearing coming soon. “I want to go into a program,” he said. “But I’m not going to lie. I’m going to go into Harlem,” to find his girlfriend, he said. “I’m going to have one last hurrah. And I’m out.”

Would he steal during that last visit? “If I have to,” he said.

His favorite Target has changed. Practically every single one of the items he described having stolen is now locked up behind plastic barriers. Aveeno, Sensodyne toothpaste — actually, all the toothpaste. CeraVe lotion, Cetaphil cleanser, makeup, makeup remover. Row after row.

When he arrives, he’ll find that almost everything is out of reach now. And he will see his reflection in the plastic, staring back.



# Business

## Frequent fliers are rethinking their loyalty

As airlines make changes to programs, some say they're done chasing miles

BY MIKE DANG

When SuzAnn Brantner moved to Indiana from Los Angeles during the coronavirus pandemic, she had been a longtime Delta Air Lines frequent flier, achieving the highest loyalty status the airline offered: Diamond Medallion. The benefits included expedited security screenings, priority boarding and top preference for complimentary first-class upgrades.

"I just always loved Delta," Ms. Brantner, a 50-year-old marketing executive, said. She traveled every month because of her job and made sure to book all her flights with Delta — even if she had to make a connection and other airlines offered a direct flight. This made it easy to maintain her status.

But last year, when Delta announced it would be making modifications to its frequent-flier program, Ms. Brantner began to question her loyalty.

She is hardly alone. On Reddit communities dedicated to three major U.S. carriers — Delta, United Airlines and American Airlines — some users are wondering whether maintaining airline loyalty status is worth it anymore, as they calculate how much they will need to spend and travel for the rest of the year to reach certain status levels next year.

After The New York Times asked readers how they felt about their loyalty programs, more than 100 wrote in to say they were through chasing airline status. Some of the respondents said they were considering canceling their airline credit cards, for which banks team up with airlines to offer additional benefits like lounge access and which offer more opportunities to earn status tied to spending.

Many expressed disappointment at having spent years accruing points and miles with their chosen airlines, only for those achievements to become significantly devalued as airlines made changes to their programs.

Ms. Brantner recalled a time when she had to spend \$15,000 each year with Delta to reach the top-tier status. Now the company is asking customers to spend \$28,000 annually to earn Diamond status. She also learned that her American Express Delta Reserve credit card would be imposing restrictions on how many times she could use the airline's Sky Club lounges — unless she

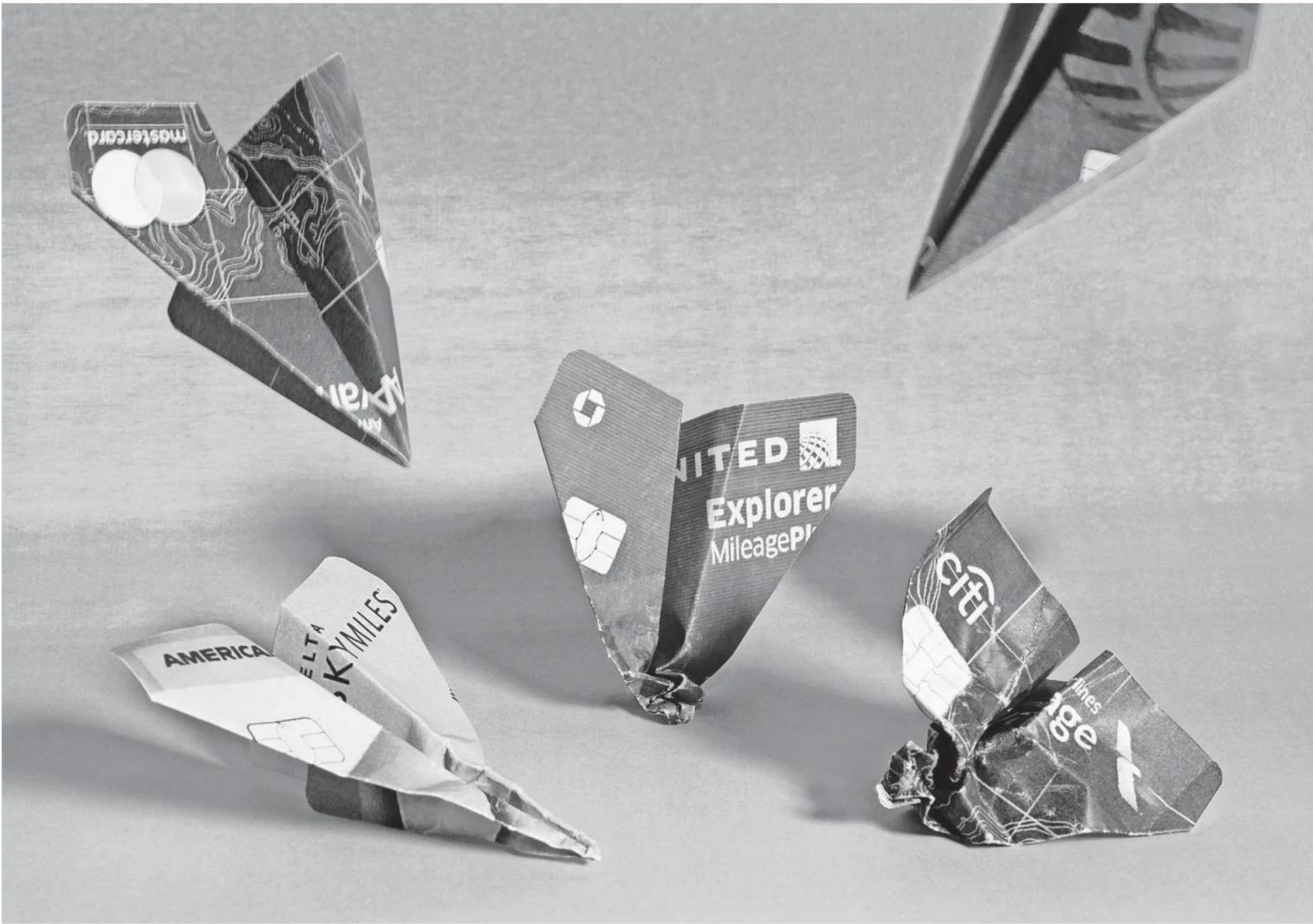


PHOTO ILLUSTRATION BY BEN DENZER; PHOTOGRAPHS BY PRIYA ALMELKAR, MATT GWIN AND CECILIA ROSA

spent at least \$75,000 on her card each year.

Enough was enough. Ms. Brantner has begun flying with American when she needs to go to Los Angeles because the airline offers more convenient direct flights from Indianapolis. When the Killers, her favorite band, had a residency in Las Vegas this year, she flew direct on Southwest Airlines to see them.

"I was like, 'Why am I torturing myself doing these connections?'" Ms. Brantner said. "I'm not going to go with just any airline. I'm just going to do what's best for me."

She said she had called American Express to cancel her Delta Reserve card but was offered \$300 to hold on to it, so she's keeping it for another year.

**Many expressed disappointment at having spent years accruing points, only for them to become significantly devalued.**

### WHAT THE AIRLINES SAY

Airlines often have good reasons for changing their rules and programs, even if it means upsetting some longtime customers. In Delta's case, its airport lounges were setting record highs for visits, leading to overcrowding. This year, the airline has been selling 88 percent of its first-class seats, compared with just 14 percent in 2011, making fewer upgrades available to its status holders.

"We highly value the loyalty our SkyMiles and card members continue to show the Delta brand by engaging with us at record levels," a Delta representative said. At American Express, a representative said the company continued to have "strong retention and engagement levels in the Delta co-brand card portfolio."

In a statement, United said its MileagePlus program was growing at a record pace. The company recently announced new rules that required passengers to fly more and spend more to earn status. American, in contrast, updated its loyalty program this year to offer new perks and kept its thresholds for earning status the same as in recent years.

When airlines make it more difficult for fliers to meet certain thresholds for status, those who do face less competition for upgrade perks, making holding status feel more exclusive. Still, some frequent fliers like Dan Daley have decided the programs are no longer worth it after years of elite status.

Mr. Daley, a freelance journalist, has flown more than four million miles with American and has held Executive Platinum status — the airline's most coveted tier — for 17 years. To maintain his status, he would often do what is known as a mileage run — for example, taking a day trip to Paris to have lunch for the sole purpose of accumulating frequent-flier miles.

Having top-tier status made him rec-

ognizable to gate agents and other employees at American, and he said he was greeted as if he were family whenever he traveled. But over the years, watching the airline change its reward structure and seeing his accrued miles become devalued began to bother him.

"I saw the game was becoming rigged," Mr. Daley, 71, said.

A few years ago, he decided to ditch his status and began employing a new strategy: Fly less and simply buy a first-class ticket on whichever airline offered him the best deal.

"It's been a much better ride ever since," he said.

When asked how the airline was trying to hold on to longtime customers who might be eyeing other carriers, a representative for American said it had introduced more ways for travelers to use their miles and was now "providing rewards before and between status levels."

### THE ALTERNATIVES

One of Rachel Lipson's oldest credit cards is a Delta SkyMiles card that she signed up for when she was in her 20s. She used to put all of her spending on the card to maintain status and accrue mileage, but has since stopped.

"Once every couple of years, I would be able to get a free trip out of it," Ms. Lipson, 43, said. "I thought it was so magical. Fast-forward to now, it's not going to get you much."

She now runs a business, Brooklyn Family Travelers, that teaches families how to strategically book trips using the right credit cards and how to maximize rewards points from different programs.

"I think that there's an opportunity cost to putting all your spending on one airline card," she said. "You're married to that airline. So then if there's a devaluation with the points or the miles, you're really vulnerable to that devaluation."

She said certain credit cards could automatically give travelers hotel status or flight perks if they simply held the card and enrolled in programs. Many also offer perks like Global Entry or Clear, which can help travelers move through airports more quickly.

Mr. Daley's American Express Platinum credit card is not tied to any airline, but it still helps get him lounge access when he's at an airport, including the bank's high-end Centurion lounges.

This is appealing to travelers like Ms. Brantner, who said she did not have time to sit down and figure out how to maximize rewards points.

"It's too much work," she said. "Just get me in the lounge and I'm happy."

## Don't rely on markets to keep Trump in check

### STRATEGIES

BY JEFF SOMMER

The president-elect follows the markets closely. He bragged frequently about how well stocks performed in his first term in office and said they had boomed this year in anticipation of his return to the White House.

Since Election Day, a great deal of financial analysis has been devoted to one central question: How will the new Trump administration affect the markets?

But another important question isn't being asked as frequently: To what extent can the markets serve as a check on the power of the president? With Republican control of the House of Representatives and Senate and a conservative majority on the Supreme Court, Donald J. Trump will face fewer curbs from the nation's political institutions than he did in his first term. Given this vacuum, it's reasonable to wonder whether the markets will play an outsized role.

I'd say that in this stage of the presidential transition, the evidence is mixed. Yes, in a tenuous and unpredictable way, the markets are likely to influence the next administration's decision-making and, occasionally, serve as a check on some of Mr. Trump's most immoderate behavior.

But I wouldn't go far with this. For one thing, financial markets have come to discount — you might say "normalize" — actions and statements that would set off strongly negative reactions if made by other public figures. And Mr. Trump's more pugnacious statements are often viewed as initial bargaining positions. Still, from the standpoint of the markets, Mr. Trump can probably go quite far in enacting his campaign promises, as long as corporate profits rise and the economy grows.

The events of the past week or so are a case in point. Mr. Trump set out to calm the markets with appointments of urban experts known for a nonideological approach to finance, but also unleashed a global storm with the announcement that he planned to impose new 25 percent tariffs on Canada and Mexico and add a 10 percent tariff on China.

Mr. Trump seems intent both on mollifying the markets and on disregarding their message when it is incon-



DOMINIC GWINN/MIDDLE EAST IMAGES; VIA AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE — GETTY IMAGES

**Markets welcomed Mr. Trump's choice of Scott Bessent, left, as Treasury secretary. Kevin Hassett, right, a traditional economist, will lead the National Economic Council.**



ALEX BRANDON/ASSOCIATED PRESS

venient. So far, this tactic is working. On Friday, Nov. 22, Mr. Trump designated Scott Bessent, a familiar figure in finance, as his choice for Treasury secretary. Stocks and bonds rallied on the news on Monday.

But later that day, Mr. Trump declared on social media that he would impose the new tariffs as soon as he returned to the White House. These measures, as well as deeper and broader levies promised during his campaign, are a negative development in the estimation of most economists. All else equal, tariffs tend to raise prices, hurt consumers, impede economic growth and disrupt global trade and foreign currency markets.

But the markets weren't troubled. The S&P 500 hit another record on Tuesday.

It's calm on Wall Street right now, yet investors will need to hedge their bets.

### BULLISH VOICES

Mr. Bessent is a hedge fund billionaire and a Yale graduate who speaks the pragmatic, nonideological language of the markets. He once ran money for George Soros, the Republican bête noire. Of course, Mr. Bessent says he supports Mr. Trump's policies. Such fealty is a prerequisite for a high-level administration post.

In manner, he is being compared to Steven Mnuchin, the Treasury secretary in the first Trump administration. Despite chaotic conditions elsewhere in the executive branch and criticism from both the left and right, Mr. Mnuchin, a veteran banker and film financier, and also a Yale graduate, was generally esteemed in financial markets.

Similarly, the markets have greeted Mr. Bessent with undisguised appreciation.

Take "In Bessent We Trust," a brief note distributed to the clients of Yardeni Research, an independent financial markets research firm headed by the veteran economist Edward Yardeni. The note quoted Mr. Bessent extensively because Mr. Bessent agrees with Mr. Yardeni's optimistic outlook. In January, Mr. Bessent wrote to his hedge fund clients that a great economic boom was probably ahead of us.

"Our base case is that a re-elected Donald Trump will want to create an economic lollapalooza and engineer what he will likely call 'the greatest four years in American history,'" Mr. Bessent said. "Economist Ed Yardeni believes that post-Covid America has the potential to have a boom similar to the 'Roaring Twenties' of a century ago. We believe that a returning Presi-

dent Trump would like this to be his legacy."

Yardeni Research wrote approvingly of Mr. Bessent's focus on the Trump tax-cutting plans, which, the Yardeni group said, could lead to "better-than-expected growth" and "help to reduce the federal deficit by generating more tax revenues."

This is a positive gloss on the outlook for Mr. Trump's economic proposals, which I think are likely to swell the budget deficit and disrupt the economy if higher tariffs and mass deportations of undocumented immigrants actually take place. But if you accentuate the positive side of Mr. Trump's promises of lower taxes and a lighter regulatory

**Mr. Trump seems intent on mollifying the markets and on disregarding their message when it is inconvenient.**

hand on businesses, and minimize the negatives, then the current bull market, which began under President Biden, could well continue under President Trump.

No doubt, Kevin Hassett, whom Mr. Trump has chosen to head the National Economic Council, will do what he can to ensure that the stock market rises. Mr. Hassett is a traditional, creden-

tial economist who served in the first Trump administration. Yet he has said that tariffs can be negative for economic growth and that by expanding the labor supply, immigration tends to help the economy.

He is an author of "Dow 36,000: The New Strategy for Profiting From the Coming Rise in the Stock Market" — an interesting but spectacularly ill-timed book on investing. It said the market was undervalued (the Dow was below 11,000 then) and would grow tremendously in the years ahead.

The problem was that the book came out in September 1999 — just months before the dot.com bubble burst in March 2020. As a guide for market traders, Mr. Hassett's book was unhelpful, to say the least. But over the long run, it was certainly right. The Dow reached that 36,000 benchmark three years ago and has surpassed it. Buying and holding a diversified stock portfolio over decades has been a brilliant approach. Getting through the bad years is a trial, however, requiring plenty of safe cash holdings as well as ample patience and fortitude.

### TARIFFS AND IMMIGRANTS

Mr. Trump has made it impossible to disregard his policies on tariffs as well as immigration.

He raised these issues without any

apparent outside prompting, threatening in posts on Truth Social, the online platform owned by his own media company, to impose 25 percent tariffs on goods from Canada and Mexico until "Drugs, in particular Fentanyl, and all Illegal Aliens stop this Invasion of our Country!"

In addition, he assailed China, threatening to add a 10 percent tariff to Chinese products because, he claimed, China was sending illegal drugs. "Representatives of China told me that they would institute their maximum penalty, that of death, for any drug dealers caught doing this but, unfortunately, they never followed through," he said.

The currencies of Mexico and Canada declined against the dollar, while the Chinese renminbi, a controlled currency, became the object of intense speculation in futures markets, where traders have been wagering on how low Chinese officials will allow the renminbi to fall.

Officials in all three countries issued protests. In Mexico, President Claudia Sheinbaum raised the prospect of retaliatory tariffs, a stronger response than her immediate predecessor, Andrés Manuel López Obrador.

At a minimum, Mr. Trump's salvo served as a reminder of his disruptive global agenda. It revived longstanding questions about the reliability of the United States as a trade partner and plunged many countries, businesses and investors into difficult discussions about how to navigate the years ahead.

Yet the U.S. stock market was largely unmoved by these concerns. The S&P 500 has gained more than 30 percent over the last 12 months.

It's still early. In a contest between ideology, politics and the markets, I'm not confident that Mr. Trump will always come down on the side of the markets. Nor am I sanguine about the short-term judgment of the markets on much of anything. So I'm not counting on the stock or bond markets to be reliable bulwarks against excesses, in the way that robust political institutions would be.

I expect the new administration to try to help the markets rise. And if Mr. Trump's policies interfere with the ability of companies to make profits and of investors to prosper, I expect course corrections. That may be scant consolation, but I think it's realistic. In the meantime, enjoy the boom as long as it lasts. But hedge your bets.



# The deadliest job in America

COOS BAY, ORE.

Logging is a way of life for some rural places, but it comes with grave risks

BY KURTIS LEE

In southwestern Oregon, semi trucks loaded with logs snake along roads through dark, lush forests of Douglas fir. The logging industry has shaped and sustained families here for generations. A steady demand for lumber and a lack of other well-paying jobs in rural parts of the state have made logging one of the most promising career paths.

It also comes with grave risk. A glossary of logging terms includes an entry for heavy broken branches that can fall without warning: widowmakers.

Mostly employed in forested pockets of the American Pacific Northwest and the South, loggers have the highest rate of fatal on-the-job injuries of any civilian occupation in the United States, outpacing roofers, hunters and underground mining machine operators.

About 100 of every 100,000 logging workers die from work injuries, compared with four per 100,000 for all workers, according to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics.

“There is a mix of physical factors — heavy equipment and, of course, the massive trees,” said Marissa Baker, a professor of occupational health at the University of Washington who has researched the logging industry. “Couple that with steep terrain and unforgiving weather and the rural aspect of the work, and it leads to great danger.”

In the most rural stretches of Oregon, many workers decide the risk is worth it. Most loggers here earn around \$29 an hour. And average timber industry wages are 17 percent higher than local private-sector wages, according to a recent report from the Oregon Department of Administrative Services.

Logging operates mostly year round, with workers usually bouncing among companies — sometimes called outfits — where pay can vary according to the specific job that needs to be done. But the industry has declined steeply since the 1990s, partly because of competition from other countries, including Brazil and Canada, and years of legal battles as conservationists seek to limit logging in old-growth forests.

In 1990, 11,000 Oregonians worked in the logging industry, including those who took down trees and drove trucks — a figure that had dropped to 4,400 by 2024, according to federal data.

When Joe Benetti moved to Coos Bay in the late 1970s from Reno, Nev., more than a dozen lumber mills were in the area, he said. Today, there are just a handful, and Mr. Benetti, the mayor, said the local economy relied mainly on tourism from a nearby casino and a golf resort.

“Our timber industry is just not what it used to be,” he said.

Yet for many people in the small forest towns along the Coast Range, logging still offers the promise of a more prosperous life.

That was what drew Eduardo Mendoza Arias to Coos Bay.

After arriving in the United States from Mexico as a child, he lived in California’s Central Valley and worked in orchards. Mr. Mendoza Arias then moved to Oregon and began looking for jobs in logging in the early 2000s.

Soon after he arrived, he met his girlfriend, Jennifer, through friends. The couple eventually married and had three daughters — Sabrina, Marcela and Monica. Mr. Mendoza Arias supported the family on his salary, which ranged from \$20 to \$35 an hour.

In 2006, Mr. Mendoza Arias started working at Riverside Logging, a company with fewer than 20 employees. He spent his shifts harvesting Douglas firs and operating a yarder, a huge machine used to move logs from one area of a job site to another.

Mrs. Mendoza Arias recalled hearing from her husband for years about the stresses of his job — a fear, for example, that his yarder would slip down a steep hillside. He sometimes needed to take time off, she said.

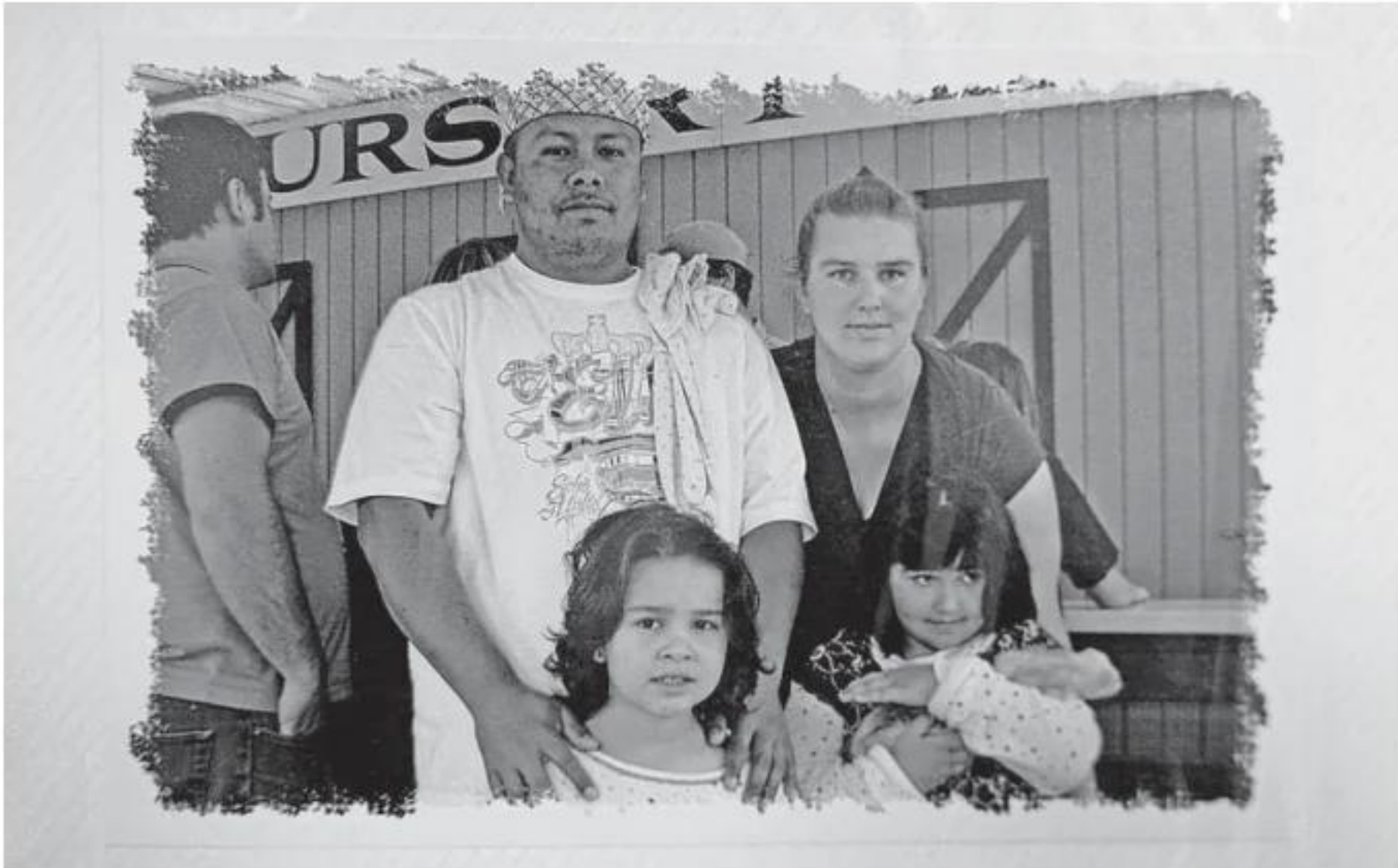
On the morning of Jan. 6, 2021, Mr. Mendoza Arias, who was 39, packed his



PHOTOGRAPHS BY KRISTINA BARKER FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES



Above, loading logs in Oregon. Left, Jennifer Mendoza Arias, who recalled hearing from her husband, Eduardo, for years about the stresses of his job and his fear of being injured. Below left, an old photo of them with two of their daughters. Right, Dennis Root, left, with his son Caleb.



He slipped and fell. A piece of his clothing got tangled in the rotating shaft, and he was pulled into the machine, which crushed him.



lunch, fed the family’s dog and headed to the job site, a desolate stretch outside the city. As he and colleagues worked the area, clearing trees, rain pelted down.

Sometime around noon, a co-worker radioed to Mr. Mendoza Arias, who was on the yarder, and told him it appeared that some of the equipment wasn’t processing the wood correctly, according to an Oregon Occupational Safety and Health report. After Mr. Mendoza Arias got out of the yarder’s cab to inspect the equipment, he slipped and fell. A piece of his clothing got tangled in the rotating shaft, and he was pulled into the machine, which crushed him.

When the sheriff arrived at her home that afternoon, Mrs. Mendoza Arias said, she thought it was about her mother, who had serious health issues.

“My head and heart have been spinning with sadness ever since,” Mrs. Mendoza Arias said one day this fall.

Oregon officials cited Riverside Logging for not having a guard in place to prevent contact with the shaft and fined the company \$1,500.

The company did not respond to a request for comment for this article.

Since 2019, Oregon Occupational Safety and Health has conducted 156 inspections of logging companies, resulting in the identification of 292 violations and total initial penalties of \$231,862, said Aaron Corvin, a spokesman for the agency. Most of those inspections were scheduled, he said. “That is testimony to our emphasis on identifying and correcting hazards before an accident occurs, or a worker is injured or killed,” he added.

The danger of the job did not dissuade Dennis Root, 53, who started in the business at 17, drawn by the financial rewards as well as the adrenaline rush.

“There is a pride and thrill seeker in being a logger,” he said. “Out here, we live and breathe logging.”

Still, he has experience with its hazards.

Mr. Root has worked for several small independent companies near the city of Sheridan, about an hour south of Portland. On a recent morning, he left his home in darkness at 4:30 and headed to a job site along a rural stretch. He’s a hooktender, acting as the foreman for a logging crew. His 18-year-old son is now a logger.

The sloped terrain in much of coastal Oregon makes it difficult to harvest timber, Mr. Root said. And the wet weather this time of year, he said, makes it even more challenging.

“Everyone needs to be on the same

page or it can get bad real fast,” he said.

In 2003, Mr. Root was struck in the head by a log, an injury that left him with a concussion and required facial reconstruction surgery.

“That about ended it for me,” he said. In fact, in the more than 30 years he has been a logger, Mr. Root has quit three times — sold his boots, helmets, hickory shirts — and done something else. He built houses. He did welding work. But each time, after a few months, the forest called him back.

In 2019, a man working with Mr. Root was killed when a log struck him. The crew tried to resuscitate him, but by the time an emergency medical helicopter arrived, he had died.

“There is a trauma that stays with you,” Mr. Root said, his voice trailing off, “but you just deal with it and go back to work.”

nese companies sold 9.75 million fully electric and hybrid vehicles, an increase of 34 percent from a year earlier, according to the China Association of Automobile Manufacturers. About one million were exported outside China.

BYD is well positioned as the leader, with a market share of around 35 percent. In China, its biggest market, BYD sold 2.9 million fully electric and hybrid vehicles in the first 10 months of the year, an increase of 35 percent from a year earlier, according to the China Passenger Car Association. Globally, BYD has broken into the top 10 of total vehicles sold and looks poised to pass Ford Motor and Honda soon.

The company has aggressively expanded overseas. It has built assembly lines in Brazil, Hungary, Thailand and Uzbekistan.

From January through October, Chi-

Jack Ewing contributed reporting.

## Conferees get reminder of exposure to plastic

BY HIROKO TABUCHI

The wristbands look like those you might find at a souvenir shop: bendy loops of silicone, in the color of your choice. But scientists are increasingly using the bands to measure exposure to toxic chemicals present in the air around us and in everyday items we use, including personal care products.

Silicone mimics the way the human body absorbs harmful chemicals and has little pores similar in size to pores in human cells. Having people wear the wristbands, and then studying the chemicals the bands absorb, can give scientists a good understanding of the chemicals the wearers were exposed to.

As negotiations continued through Sunday in South Korea on a global treaty to tackle plastic pollution — including restricting the harmful chemicals present in plastic — 12 high-ranking United Nations officials said they had worn the wristbands this year to measure their exposure to toxic chemicals.

The unusual experiment, which included the U.N. High Commissioner for Human Rights, Volker Türk, took place for five days this year. It was organized by the International Pollutants Elimination Network, or IPEN, a global network of nonprofit groups supporting stronger chemical regulation.

The project focused on globally unregulated chemicals found in plastic and plastic manufacturing that are thought to be harmful to health.

The results, which showed that each of the U.N. officials had been exposed to more than 30 different chemicals, were released on Thursday. It was meant to be illustrative, the group said, to drive home the fact that the treaty negotiators themselves are vulnerable to chemicals that could have health effects.

“It’s so easy for delegates sitting in these conference rooms to become removed from reality,” said Sara Brosché, an environmental scientist at IPEN and the study’s lead author.

How the world should address chemicals present in plastics has become a big point of contention at the plastic treaty talks, which have become bogged down in disputes over procedure, as well as disagreement over whether to restrict the production of plastic.

**Talks on plastic pollution have become bogged down in disputes, including some over dealing with the chemicals involved.**

A proposal from Turkey would establish a scientific body to start determining a list of “chemicals of concern.” Brazil has proposed specific criteria to assess such chemicals. But Canada, Georgia, Ghana and others have pushed for binding obligations to start phasing some chemicals out of plastics entirely.

The chemical industry, however, has argued for a more targeted treaty that would focus on measures like recycling, rather than restricting plastic production or harmful chemicals.

Many chemicals found in plastic products are known or suspected to disrupt the human endocrine system, and play a role in reproductive disorders, cancer, diabetes, obesity, heart disease and other serious health conditions. The vast majority are unregulated at a global level.

Kim A. Anderson, a professor of environmental and molecular toxicology at Oregon State University who led the development of the use of the silicone wristbands, said it was important to remember that not all of the detected chemicals would come exclusively from plastic.

Dr. Anderson, who was not involved in the IPEN study, said a group of chemicals called phthalates, for example, which are used to make plastics more flexible and durable, are also present in many cleaning and personal care products. Phthalates are thought to negatively affect pregnancy, child growth and development.

But her own research has shown that phthalates were almost always found among participants in wristband studies, which she said “pointed to the pervasiveness of phthalates both as an additive in personal care products and as an additive in plastics.”

As part of the new study, IPEN partnered with a Thailand-based nonprofit group, Ecological Alert and Recovery Thailand, or EARTH, to use wristbands to study exposure among local plastic workers and recyclers — and found that plastic waste and recycling workers were the most exposed.

Research has also increasingly shown that people can be exposed to chemicals found in plastic not just from contact with plastics but from the air, food, water and dust.

That’s what Marcos A. Orellana, the U.N. Special Rapporteur on toxics and human rights, rediscovered after wearing one of the wristbands. Thirty-four different chemicals were detected in his wristband, including phthalates and a UV stabilizer, a chemical added to materials to protect them from ultraviolet radiation.

“It made me think: ‘If I’m exposed to these levels, what about my kids?’” Mr. Orellana said.

## Automakers in China tell suppliers to cut costs

BY CLAIRE FU  
AND DAISUKE WAKABAYASHI

Faced with a bruising price war in the fast-growing but crowded domestic market for electric vehicles, Chinese automobile manufacturers are pressing suppliers to deliver hefty cost cuts.

China’s BYD, the world’s largest manufacturer of electric vehicles, asked a supplier to reduce its product prices by 10 percent, starting next year, according to a company email that was apparently leaked and circulated widely on the internet in China.

He Zhiqi, BYD’s executive vice president, said that the competition for so-called new energy vehicles — China’s preferred phrase for fully electric and gas-electric hybrid vehicles — was entering a “decisive battle” or “knockout match,” according to the email with the subject line “BYD Passenger Vehicle

Cost Reduction Requirements in 2025.”

“In order to enhance the competitiveness of BYD passenger cars, we need the entire supply chain to work together and continue to reduce costs,” Mr. He wrote.

On Wednesday, a BYD spokesman wrote on Weibo, the Chinese social media site, that annual price negotiations with suppliers are a common practice in the automotive industry. He added that because of BYD’s large scale, it sets “price reduction targets” for suppliers that are not mandatory and can be negotiated. He did not comment on the email specifically nor whether other suppliers were facing similar demands.

BYD did not respond to requests for comment.

SAIC Maxus Automotive, an arm of the Chinese state-owned automobile manufacturer SAIC, recently sent a letter to its suppliers asking for a 10 per-

cent reduction in costs, citing oversupply in China’s automobile market, according to news reports in state media. The letter noted that so many manufacturers are introducing new cars that it does not expect the price war to abate anytime soon.

SAIC Maxus Automotive, which makes trucks, sport utility vehicles and electric vehicles, did not immediately respond to an email seeking comment.

China’s electric vehicle market is the world’s largest but also its most cut-throat, with dozens of brands jostling for position. The intense competition has ignited a price war among manufacturers battling for market share and brand recognition.

The fight has moved overseas as many Chinese brands look to markets like Thailand and Brazil, where they can sell electric vehicles at lower prices than many other automakers.



# Opinion

## This maverick thinker is the Karl Marx of our time

Wolfgang Streeck has a convincing theory of how globalization went wrong.

Christopher Caldwell

Who could have seen Donald Trump's resounding victory coming? Ask the question of an American intellectual these days and you may meet with embittered silence. Ask a European intellectual and you will likely hear the name of Wolfgang Streeck, a German sociologist and theorist of capitalism. In recent decades, Mr. Streeck has described the complaints of populist movements with unequaled power. That is because he has a convincing theory of what has gone wrong in the complex gearworks of American-driven globalization, and he has been able to lay it out with clarity. Mr. Streeck may be best known for his essays in *The New Left Review*, including a dazzling series on the cascade of financial crises that followed the crash of 2008. He resembles Karl Marx in his conviction that capitalism has certain internal contradictions that make it unsustainable — the more so in its present “neoliberal” form. His latest book, “Taking Back Control? States and State Systems After Globalism,” published this month, asks whether the global economy as it is now set up is compatible with democracy. He has his doubts.

Understand Mr. Streeck and you will understand a lot about the left-wing movements that share his worldview — Syriza in Greece, Podemos in Spain and the new Sahra Wagenknecht Alliance in Germany. But you will also understand Viktor Orban, Brexit and Mr. Trump.

Mr. Streeck (whose name rhymes with “cake”) argues that today's contradictions of capitalism have been building for half a century. Between the end of World War II and the 1970s, he reminds us, working classes in Western countries won robust incomes and extensive protections. Profit margins suffered, of course, but that was in the nature of what Mr. Streeck calls the “postwar settlement.” What economies

The “global economy” is a place where common people have no leverage.

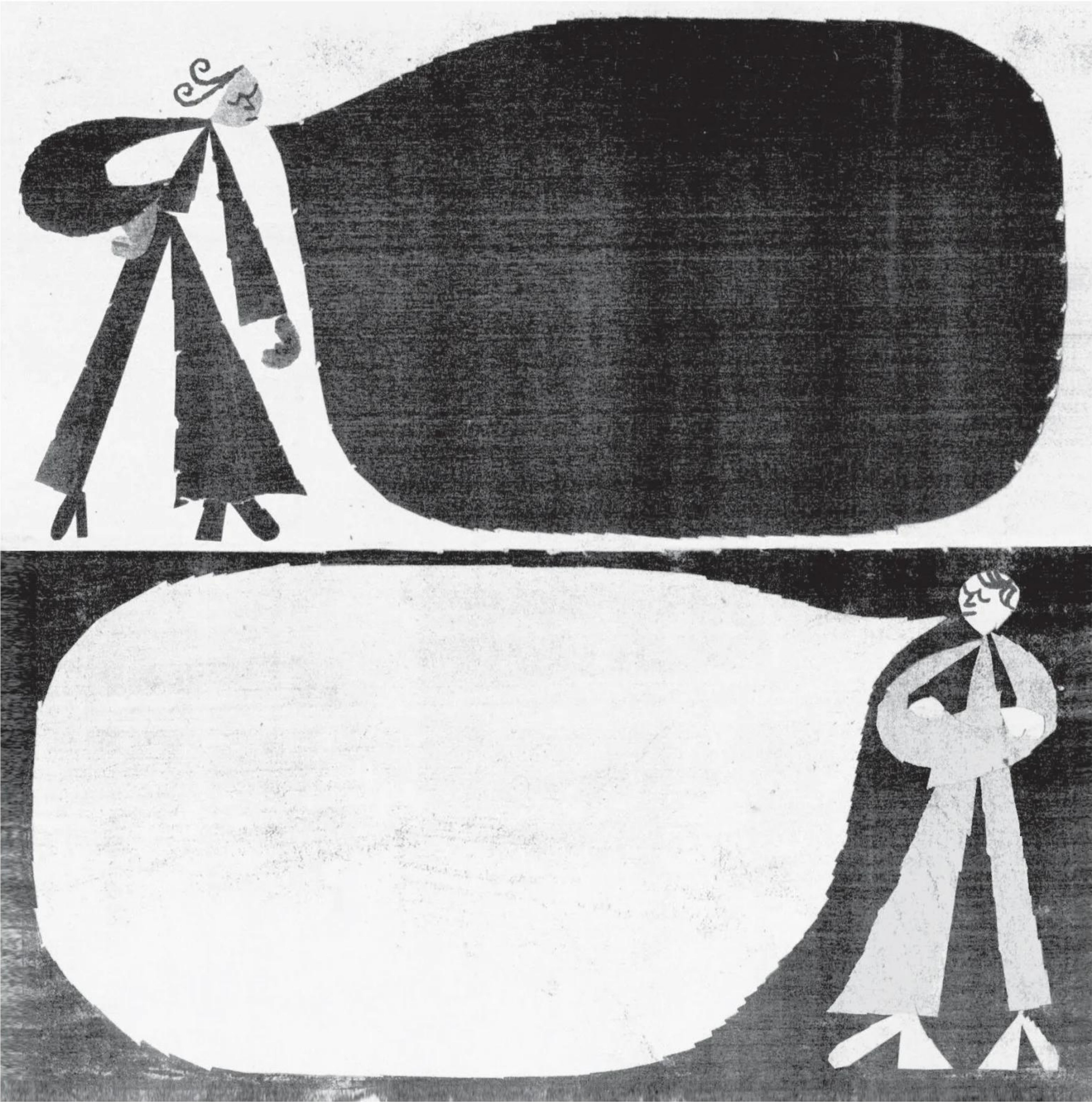
lost in dynamism, they gained in social stability.

But starting in the 1970s, things began to change. Sometime after the Arab oil embargo of 1973, investors got nervous. The economy began to stall. This placed politicians in a bind. Workers had the votes to demand more services. But that required making demands on business, and business was having none of it. States finessed the matter by permitting the money supply to expand. For a brief while, this maneuver allowed them to offer more to workers without demanding more of bosses. Essentially, governments had begun borrowing from the next generation.

That was the Rubicon, Mr. Streeck believes: “the first time after the post-war growth period that states took to introducing not-yet-existing future resources into the conflict between labor and capital.” They never broke the habit.

Very quickly their policies sparked inflation. Investors balked again.

It took a painful tightening of money to stabilize prices. Ronald Reagan's supply-side regime eased the pain a bit, but only by running record government deficits. Bill Clinton was able to eliminate these, but only by deregulating private banking and borrowing, Mr. Streeck shows. In other words, the dangerous debt exposure was shifted out of the Treasury and into the bank accounts of middle-class and working-class households. This led, eventually,



MARIA MOTTUN

to the financial crisis of 2008.

As Mr. Streeck sees it, a series of (mostly American) attempts to calm the economy after the '70s produced the system we now call neoliberalism. “Neoliberalism,” he argues, “was, above all, a political-economic project to end the inflation state and free capital from its imprisonment in the postwar settlement.” This project has never really been reconsidered, even as one administration's fix turns into the next generation's crisis.

At each stage of neoliberalism's evolution, Mr. Streeck stresses, key decisions have been made by technocrats, experts and other actors relatively insulated from democratic accountability. When the crash came in

2008, central bankers stepped in to take over the economy, devising quantitative easing and other novel methods of generating liquidity. During the Covid emergency of 2020 and 2021, Western countries turned into full-blown exptocracies, bypassing democracy outright. A minuscule class of administrators issued mandates on every aspect of national life — masks, vaccinations, travel, education, church openings — and incurred debt at levels that even the most profligate Reaganite would have considered surreal.

Mr. Streeck has a clear vision of something paradoxical about the neoliberal project: For the global economy to be “free,” it must be constrained. What the proponents of neoliberalism

mean by a free market is a deregulated market. But getting to deregulation is trickier than it looks because in free societies, regulations are the result of people's sovereign right to make their own rules. The more democratic the world's societies are, the more idiosyncratic they will be, and the more their economic rules will diverge. But that is exactly what businesses cannot tolerate — at least not under globalization. Money and goods must be able to move frictionlessly and efficiently across borders. This requires a uniform set of laws. Somehow, democracy is going to have to give way.

A uniform set of laws also requires a single international norm. Which norm? That's another problem, as Mr.

Streeck sees it: The global regime we have is a reliable copy of the American one. This brings order and efficiency but also tilts the playing field in favor of American corporations, banks and investors.

Perhaps that is what blighted the West's relations with Russia, where the transition to global capitalism “was tightly controlled by American government agencies, foundations and N.G.O.s,” Mr. Streeck says, and the oligarchs who emerged to run the government in the 1990s were “received with open arms by American corporations and, not least, the London real estate market.” To an Indian or a Chinese person, “free markets” established

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## A supposedly dying language that's thrillingly alive

Yiddish is a thriving world unto itself.

John McWhorter

If I tell you that there are languages other than English that someone in America could live a whole life in, which would come to mind? Spanish, maybe? Chinese? Both are spoken in (among many other settings) tight-knit communities that are continually refreshed by new immigration. Pondering a little further, you might think of rural Amish communities that speak dialects of German.

I doubt that many people would think of Yiddish.

In mainstream American culture Yiddish — an Eastern European blend of German with a great many Hebrew, Aramaic and Slavic words — is these days either a punchline (a “chutpah” or a “klutz” in a comic's monologue) or a historic footnote, a vanishing artifact of a long-gone era. Rueful tales of the days when New York supported a dozen Yiddish-language newspapers, or articles about the last of the Yiddish bookstores, always gave the language a twilight air. Even the stated intention of some younger people to revive Yiddish

implies that the language requires some kind of resuscitation.

That would be a surprise to people who live in ultra-Orthodox Jewish communities such as Kiryas Joel and Monsey, N.Y., where Yiddish is the dominant language. Despite supposedly vanishing into history, it has 250,000 speakers in America alone, the majority of them in settings like these.

I have had the pleasure and privilege of getting to know one such family during my summer stays at an old Jewish bungalow colony. That family — a husband and wife, along with two of their grown daughters and a grandchild — have taught me a great deal about the language and what it means to them.

Yiddish is written with Hebrew letters, but as for the Hebrew language as a whole, these communities use it only for prayer. For everything else, they use Yiddish. They speak it day in and day out, like characters in the Sholem Aleichem stories that were later adapted as “Fiddler on the Roof.” Because their culture frowns on using the internet, they read the news in Yiddish newspapers — thick, bustling newspaper newspapers of the kind disappearing in so many American locales. As for English, it's something taught in school for the

# English Yiddish

PABLO DELCAN

second half of the day. People's competence in it varies considerably according to interest, knack for languages and exposure outside of class.

Chaya, one of the family's daughters (who asked me not to use their last name in this very public setting), told me that her first memory is lying on her mother's lap listening to Yiddish. Now Chaya is a mother. Her daughter, 2 years and a

good bit when I last saw her, was beginning to know English, but her language, thoughts and sense of normal communication were still Yiddish. When I spoke with her, she could only fitfully understand what I said.

Chaya's English is perfect, but it is slightly distinct from mainstream Northeastern English. What one dialect lets go, another may hold on to, so Chaya

and her family speak in a way that retains some of the traits of earlier New York English — as when she told me, “I've spoken English since I'm 5.” When I moved to New York City in 2002, the first time I had occasion to hear an ultra-Orthodox guy talk, I was delighted to hear a living person who sounded somewhat like a character in an early talkie film of the late 1920s or early 1930s — Eddie Cantor or Lillian Roth speaking live.

The Yiddish of modern ultra-Orthodox communities is a lesson for those who consider it a desecration for one language to take on words from another — a common complaint, among purists, toward Spanglish. If languages are spoken in close proximity, a certain degree of blending is inevitable, no more a matter of pollution than the thousands of French words that English took on when the Normans ruled England.

Along these lines, the Yiddish that Chaya and her family speak drinks deeply from the English vocabulary. As their conversation flew by me, I caught “washing machine” and “tights.” Chaya's little girl said “juice cup,” “home” and “Mommy.” A man casually told someone to “pushen” a stroller,

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## Tragic optimism can be a balm for trying times

Brad Stulberg

When we find ourselves in the thick of disorder, uncertainty or loss, resilience can seem impossible, even trite, to hope for.

At the end of September, Hurricane Helene wreaked havoc on my community in western North Carolina. Businesses, homes and more than 100 lives were lost. Schools were closed for a month. There was no running water for nearly three weeks, and safe drinking water took far longer to come back. And yet, from Day 1, the community rallied. People were out with chain saws clearing roads; neighbors shared water, food and power sources; porches, backyards and storefronts turned into mini-congregations for daily gatherings and social support. Rebuilding will be a long and arduous process, but it is already underway.

Just over a month after the hurricane hit, Donald Trump was elected U.S. president again. For many, myself included, considering the character of this new administration and its promises, despair has been a constant temptation.

In both North Carolina and on the national scene, it can feel like we are stymied in growth, in hope, in vigor. But every path of progress — both individual and collective — includes failures and downturns, even periods of hopelessness. In the immediate aftermath of disappointment and disorder, it is understandable to freeze or shut down. But eventually, we've got to rise up and move forward — if for no other reason than the alternative is worse.

Finding meaning and maintaining hope despite inevitable pain, loss and suffering is a crucial life skill. In 1949, the Holocaust survivor and psychologist Viktor Frankl coined the term "tragic optimism" to describe this conundrum.

Tragic optimism emerged out of what Dr. Frankl observed to be the three tragedies that everyone faces (not only those of us who have seen the worst of the world, as he had). The first tragedy is pain, because we are made of flesh and bone.

The second is guilt, because we have the freedom to make choices and thus feel responsible when things don't go our way. The third is loss, because we must face the reality that everything we cherish is impermanent, including our own lives.

Tragic optimism means acknowledging, accepting and even expecting that life will contain hardship and hurt, then doing everything we can to move forward with a positive attitude anyway. It recognizes that one cannot be happy by trying to be happy all the time, or worse yet, assuming we ought to be.

Rather, tragic optimism holds space for the full range of human experience

and emotion, giving us permission to feel happiness and sadness, hope and fear, loss and possibility — sometimes in the same day, and even in the same hour.

Research shows that this sort of emotional flexibility is associated with resilience. For example, a study of U.S. college students after Sept. 11 found that those who could hold on to hope at the same time as loss demonstrated greater resilience and fewer depressive symptoms in the tragedy's aftermath. This finding is not about denial or delusion. Most of the study participants experienced negative emotions such as anger, fear and sadness. It's just that the more resilient ones were able to hold on to positive emotions, too.

Tragic optimism does not encourage actively seeking out or romanticizing suffering. Not everything has to be meaningful; sometimes things just suck. Rather, tragic optimism realizes the inevitability of suffering but also that we generally have at least some say in how we face it.

Difficult moments, both personal and collective, often lead to extreme behaviors: what's now known as toxic positivity on the one hand — burying our heads in the sand and deluding ourselves that everything is great — or excessive pessimism and despair on the other. Both absolve us of doing anything about the situation.

Excessive optimism and delusion, at root, deny that anything is wrong; and if nothing is wrong, there is nothing to worry about and nothing to change. Extreme pessimism and despair are so grim they essentially say that any action would be pointless. Between these two poles exists a third way: committing to wise hope and wise action.

Wise hope and wise action ask us to accept a situation and see it clearly for what it is, and then muster the strength, courage and resolve to focus on what we can control. We remind ourselves that we have faced challenges before. We continue because to stand still is not an option.

Recognizing that we maintain agency fuels hope, and maintaining hope reminds us that we have agency.

Resilience comes down to a few core factors: leaning into community, being kind to yourself, finding small routines to support your mental health, allowing yourself to feel sadness and loss and yet maintain hope at the same time. It requires a commitment to taking productive action.

At a moment when it can seem that all is lost, we'd be wise to embrace tragic optimism, wise hope and wise action. In this we recognize we can exert our agency, even if limitedly, even if only in increments, however we can.

These attitudes and skills, and our willingness to adopt and practice them, are essential to not only our individual resilience but also that of our communities. We need both now.

BRAD STULBERG is the author of "Master of Change: How to Excel When Everything Is Changing — Including You."



ALEXANDER GLANDIER

# She made 90 million readers swoon

Sally Franson

The news that the novelist Barbara Taylor Bradford died on Nov. 24, at the age of 91, brought me right back to the library my family frequented when I was a kid, where her fat, pastel-colored paperbacks preened from the carousels to the right of the entrance. That's where the most popular, most commercial books hung out, separated from the quiet dignity of the rest of the place. It was there that my mother would find me come checkout time, surrounded first by tween smut from Sweet Valley High, then by rapes and murders from Mary Higgins Clark, and then by tales of riches, betrayals and come-from-behind triumphs from Barbara Taylor Bradford.

I knew at the time that Ms. Bradford wasn't considered an important writer like the distinguished Europeans my highbrow sister was reading. Certainly she wasn't winning fancy literary awards or critical accolades. In one Times review, the critic Andrew Postman sneered that she "manages uncannily to do precisely what good storytelling does not — to make a 'sweeping' saga parochial." But her books called me in, with heroines that succeeded not because of the men in their lives but because of intelligence and hard work. From them, I learned that while romance was exciting and at times consuming, a woman's primary purpose was to make something of herself in a world either indifferent or hostile to her efforts.

It wasn't just me. Ms. Bradford sold more than 90 million books, including 30 million copies of "A Woman of Substance" alone, making it one of the best-selling novels of all time. She did it because her books centered protagonists who were substantive, driven and career-oriented, bucking trends in both romance and literary fiction. They taught women in the '80s and '90s that feminism needn't exclude erotic pleasure, and that action, not passivity, was a feminine trait. Her readers' loyalty earned her a personal footnote rumored to rival that of Queen Elizabeth II. She has graced postage stamps, was awarded the Order of the British Empire and had 10 books adapted into mini-series and films.

But even those metrics can't capture what she meant to her readers, who stuck with her through 40 books. They did it because her characters were as real and legible to them as they were to Ms. Bradford herself. Other novelists won prestigious accolades, impressed reviewers and inspired graduate students in M.F.A. programs. Barbara Taylor Bradford changed the way readers who might not have any con-



NANCY BOROWICK FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

nection to the shifting sands of literary fashion thought about themselves and their world. She should be recognized as one of the most influential American novelists of the last half-century.

"A Woman of Substance," a period novel set in turn-of-the-century Yorkshire, was the first installment of what would grow to be an eight-book series about a self-made retail tycoon named Emma Harte. Ms. Bradford has said

she modeled Harte partly on Queen Elizabeth I, partly on Catherine the Great and partly on herself. Over decades, she traced Harte's legacy across multiple generations, eras and business ventures while championing the character's

boldly moral acts, despite the frequently high cost. "One of the reasons my books are so successful all around the world is that I write about women of integrity," she told AudioFile magazine. "They have honor, they have discipline, they are hardworking, and they go out and conquer the world."

The series covers, among other topics, the privileges and perils of the retail business, the British class system, family estrangement, hidden relatives, divorce, corporate alliances, the fashion industry, long-term marriage, tragic accidents, corporate take-

overs, wartime romance and inheritance battles, while also tucking in an almost Jamesian number of details about fancy homes and attire. (For years Ms. Bradford wrote about fashion and interior design for popular journals.) The only reason I know a thing about Edwardian tea sets, Lear jets or draperies is because of what she elegantly wove into her narratives. When I first visited Harrods in London, I was disappointed to find it wasn't as impressive as I'd imagined Harte's luxury emporium to be.

You can see Ms. Bradford's shadow in the pacing of the blockbuster romance novelist Jackie Collins and in the page-turning propulsion of contemporary writers like Paula Hawkins and Gillian Flynn. Multigenerational family sagas are everywhere these days, but when Ms. Bradford published "A Woman of Substance," I am pretty sure there were zero featuring a woman at the helm of a powerful business.

I'm more impressed, though, by her influence on readers. "Thank you for giving me the start to wonderful adventures, to meeting new people and visiting fantastic places within the covers of books," one reader recently wrote on Ms. Bradford's Facebook page.

"I hadn't read a book since high school. But that book! Made me fall in love with reading again," another confessed, "and I've never stopped!"

Feeling nostalgic, I abandoned duty

for a day last week and curled up with Ms. Bradford's most famous novel, which was just as I remembered it: cunning, sweeping and melodramatic in the best way. But this time I saw something else in it: a skeleton key for the whole of Ms. Bradford's career and legacy. The book opens with Emma Harte ill and under threat from all sides, including her conniving children. (Sound familiar?) Undaunted, she tells her granddaughter, "Being underestimated by men is one of the biggest crosses I've had to bear all of my life . . . However, it was also an advantage and one I learned to make great use of."

Ms. Bradford didn't claim excellence or boast about her accomplishments. She told this newspaper: "I'm not going to go down in history as a great literary figure. I'm a commercial writer — a storyteller." She's right. But as I reread "A Woman of Substance," I saw an earnest desire to draw a female character for whom no twist of fate is insurmountable. And I, a woman feeling frequently surmounted by obstacles these days, found myself quite moved by this portrayal, and even cried a little. And then I did what Emma Harte would do: I dried my tears, dusted myself off, resolved to be a woman of substance and got right back to work.

SALLY FRANSON is the author of the novel "Big in Sweden."

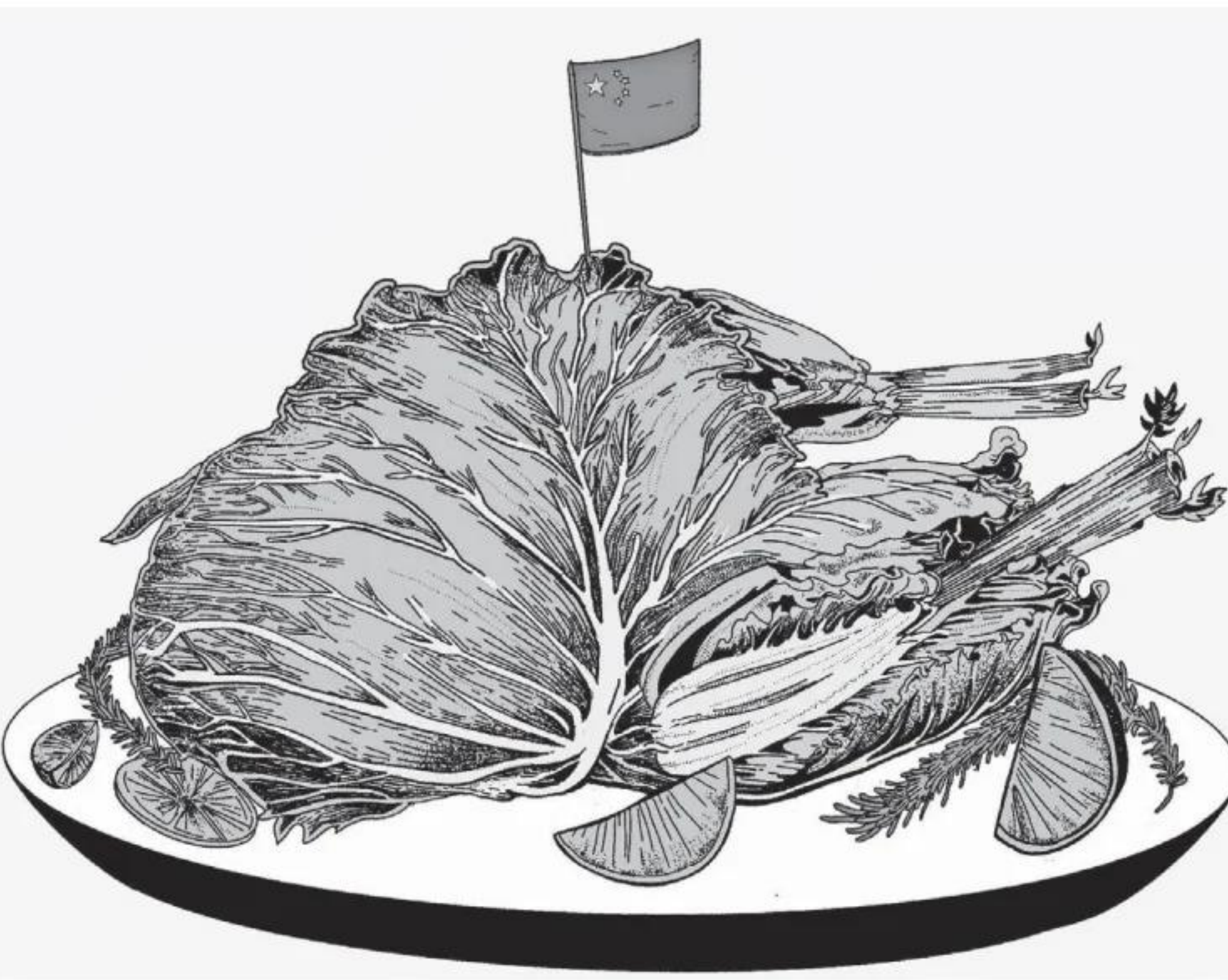
## China quests for the holy grail of meat

DREYER, FROM PAGE 1 through global supply chains — is hurting the planet. If scientists can figure out how to affordably cultivate meat in a lab at scale, it could become the standard meal-time fare of tomorrow. It might have to. And if China is willing to invest in technologies with potentially global benefits, Americans should view it not as a national security threat but as inspiration for how our protein markets could evolve, too.

China has excellent reasons for wanting to ensure that its huge population has enough to eat that have nothing to do with the United States. Older Chinese generations still harbor painful memories of mass hunger in the decades before China's era of economic reform began in the late 1970s. President Xi Jinping has reminisced about going to bed hungry in his youth, with nothing but soup for dinner. He has called food security "a red line that would trigger terrible consequences were it ever to be compromised."

Chinese official concern about food appears to be rising as the nation's dietary needs grow and relations with the United States deteriorate. China has nearly 20 percent of the world's population but less than 10 percent of its arable land. Its dependence on imported meat and other agricultural items, especially U.S. products such as soybeans (a key source of feed for China's giant pork industry), worries Beijing, especially with Donald Trump threatening to start a trade war and U.S. military strategists identifying Chinese dependence on American meat as an Achilles' heel.

China's rising demand for meat and other foods is tremendously consequential for the rest of us, too. In 2021, China accounted for about 27 percent of global meat consumption, twice the U.S. amount, and Chinese demand is climbing fast. Economic growth is allowing the country's people to enjoy richer and more varied diets, and as a result, today's Chinese are bigger and taller than their ancestors.



EVA REDAMONTI

But can the planet survive a significant increase in livestock production? Today the sector accounts for 10 to 20 percent of global greenhouse gas emissions, and world meat consumption is expected to keep rising for decades as other developing nations follow China into higher-protein diets. As Patrick Brown, the founder of the U.S. plant-based meat producer Impossible Foods, put it in 2020, "Every time someone in China eats a piece of meat, a little puff of smoke goes up in the Amazon." Such sentiments have stirred resentment in China. Its people are as entitled to a high-protein diet as anyone, and Chinese eat less meat per person than Americans do. But the planet doesn't care about abstract notions of justice. Something's got to change.

China's goal is the holy grail of meat: commercially viable alternatives that taste as good as the real thing and can be produced at scale but without the emissions, production costs, land use and risk to supply chains of animal-

sourced meat. In the United States this idea has inspired big promises from manufacturers and billions of dollars in venture capital funding over the past decade. But reality is setting in as industry players discover that producing cultivated meats in volume is far more difficult and costly than expected. China, with its state-directed approach, may be in a better position to crack the code. We have seen what its scientists and engineers can do when state planners put their minds and resources to solving difficult technical problems.

China remains dependent on many technologies developed in the West. But its unique ability to use subsidies, regulatory assistance and its enormous domestic consumer market to turn those technologies into affordable products is unparalleled. China observed Tesla closely, greenlighting Elon Musk's Shanghai manufacturing plant, which began production in 2019, before marshaling its own carmaking industry to produce much cheaper analogues.

China has raced ahead of the United States in renewable energy and is increasingly supplying the rest of the world with solar panels, wind turbines and electric cars.

The government is taking the same all-out approach on food security. Besides alternative proteins, it is stockpiling food imports and pushing forward on genetically modified crops. China is also employing innovations such as salmon farms in landlocked Xinjiang; pork skyscrapers where pigs are housed, fed and slaughtered on an industrial scale; and unmanned farms where drones and other automated equipment plant, fertilize and harvest crops.

Many Americans remain skeptical about proteins derived from nonanimal sources, but Chinese have been eating one of them — tofu — for a while now. It's hard to imagine Chinese diners completely giving up meat, but when the government goes all in on something and prepares the public for it through state-controlled media, the people usually fall in line. If it can come up with a protein solution embraced by its own consumers, chances are this made-in-China version will go global, like its solar panels and electric vehicles.

To their credit, the Republican representatives' letter acknowledged that the United States needs to find a way to remain competitive in this critical emerging sector, too. Let's hope that China's push into the alternative meat industry does not become another cynical opportunity for American lawmakers to demonize Chinese intent but is embraced as a scientific and commercial challenge. Competition is no bad thing; it can drive innovation faster and in new and necessary directions.

But if America stands in the way of progress that may be good for the world, it will only make us look like part of the problem. China will eat our lunch — or, rather, stop eating ours and start eating its own.

JACOB DREYER is an American editor and writer.



OPINION

# Lessons from couples therapy can help a divided nation

Orna Guralnik

Louisa and Isaac, a lively, warm and bright couple in their 40s, fell in love two decades ago. They were intellectually engaged with each other, adventurous and, for years, shared “deep blue” affiliations. That changed during Donald Trump’s first term.

One of their earliest arguments about politics, they told me recently, erupted when Isaac announced he thought a wall on the southern border made sense. Louisa was shocked. She worked with undocumented immigrants; the spirit of protectiveness for the vulnerable was a deep part of her identity.

As Isaac became more engaged with a conservative worldview, their arguments grew more heated. Louisa described how their political divisions made them fearful of each other. “I didn’t recognize him,” she said. “I was afraid — maybe he wasn’t a compassionate person? Who is he? Is he even kind, loving? Does he care about people?”

I was introduced to Isaac and Louisa (that’s her middle name) by a director of my Showtime series, “Couples Therapy.” In my work as a psychoanalyst and couples therapist, I see a deep resignation in response to our political divide and a newfound fear of “the other side.” Due to our political differences, people in this country are deeply alienated from one another.

From a psychoanalytic perspective, I see how political disputes follow dynamics similar to disputes between couples, albeit amplified. People typically come to *any* event with differing views of the world informed by their life and background. Couples negotiate these differences by creating their own political system and guiding ideologies.

Grasping the degree to which each of their “truths” emerges from a deeply subjective place is their most important challenge. This process is difficult — for a couple or for a country. A psychoanalytic approach offers a path.

**AS CHILDREN, EARLY IN OUR** psychological development, we all resort to a defense mechanism identified by the psychoanalyst Melanie Klein as “splitting.” To cope with negative or inexplicable experiences, we divide our perceptions of people into either all-good or all-bad. This splitting allows us to avoid dealing with feelings of vulnerability, shame, hate, ambivalence or anxiety by exter-

nalizing (or dumping) unwanted emotions onto others. We then feel free to categorize these others as entirely negative, while seeing ourselves as good.

In political environments, this kind of splitting manifests in an “us versus them” mentality — where “our” side is virtuous and correct, and “their” side is wrong and flawed — which produces the kind of rigid, extreme, ideological warring we are caught up in now.

The technologies that mediate our access to reality only exacerbate this dynamic. The algorithms used by social media prioritize sensationalist and divisive content, creating “bubbles” that limit our exposure to diverse perspectives, rather than fostering a balanced discourse.

It’s important for us to recognize just how gratifying this process can be, both for individuals and larger groups. Split-

**Psychoanalytic principles that aid feuding families can also lead us to reconcile our differences.**

ting produces a kind of ecstatic righteousness. There’s an intoxicating thrill in hate — in feeling that you’re in the bosom of a like-minded brotherhood, free from complexity and uncertainty. In this state, we’re prone to ignore information that contradicts our

idealized version of ourselves, we become allergic to dissonance, and those with differing views are cast out or canceled.

To protect this brittle and distorted version of reality, we resort to extreme defensiveness. We frame opposing arguments as a threat to our identity and values. In psychoanalytic terms, we call this the paranoid-schizoid position. We all tend to drop into this state of mind when we’re under extreme threat. In certain circumstances, it can allow for powerful acts of courage, but it’s also a state in which nuance and complexity are intolerable, and it’s too easy to see difference as danger.

What I find most striking when talking to people in my practice is how intensely afraid they are of what they describe as “the other side.” Much as Louisa and Isaac sometimes felt they no longer knew each other even after decades of marriage, many of us have become frightening strangers to each other across the political divide.

**SO HOW DO WE MAKE OUR WAY** back from this paranoid-schizoid state? It can



CECILIA BRUCH

seem difficult to imagine — but I know that empathy, compromise and brutally honest self-awareness are the beginnings of reconciliation.

In Kleinian psychoanalysis, the “depressive position” is the phase that comes after the paranoid-schizoid position, when one emerges into a more integrated and mature state. In the depressive position, individuals begin to see themselves and others as complex and multifaceted, capable of both positive and negative qualities.

To make this shift, you have to grapple with feelings of guilt and responsibility as you become aware that your aggressive feelings can hurt others — and that these feelings can also coexist with love and respect for the same person. The depressive position represents emotional maturity, within which one can reconcile ambivalence, manage feelings of loss, take responsibility and repair harm in relationships.

When I work with couples on coming back from great mistrust and animosity, the initial phase requires encouraging

each of them to take a good second look at their partner — approaching the other with friendly eyes to gather new and honest information. I embolden them to seek an attitude of true curiosity: How did their partner come to feel the way they did? What motivated them? What *matters* to them? This entails a shift in rhetoric, away from a stance of suspicion, ridicule and derision toward friendly curiosity. Interest in difference is a place of potential growth and repair.

For a culture struggling with extreme political polarization, moving toward a depressive position would mean fostering a collective capacity to see political opponents as complex, nuanced individuals rather than entirely negative or hostile figures.

To understand that Democrats and Republicans share more than they are acknowledging, you first have to recognize your own role in perpetuating conflict and harm. Selfishness and a wish to protect those closest to us are human qualities we all share and need to grapple with. But I also believe that

most of us can find within ourselves the wish to protect the vulnerable, the earth and its biosphere, the wish for a fair distribution of resources and the basic abhorrence of murderous and genocidal impulses, even if we have very different ideas of what actions these beliefs translate into.

National politics is, of course, a very specific kind of relationship. A feuding couple may not always need to come to a formal consensus on a contentious issue such as immigration policy or affirmative action — but a country does, so that legislative standards can be set.

What the psychoanalytic lens offers is a way to address the underlying patterns in which we process our disagreements. We can mourn that which we cannot change, rather than nurse our grievances. And in working toward worthy policy goals, we can avoid getting stuck in endless cycles of treating those who disagree with us as inferior, hostile or dangerous.

**I ASKED LOUISA AND ISAAC** what could help them heal their marriage. True to

themselves, they each had a different response. Isaac felt the solution, both for their country and for them, was more freedom of speech and open, rigorous debate. Louisa agreed to a point, but added: “It is a relationship, and a moral imperative to explore each other’s views and values. We need to find a way to understand what the values are that underlie what each of us is saying. I do ultimately believe differences in politics and policy can be a rich part of life.”

In an attempt to fortify their marriage, Louisa became active with Braver Angels, an organization dedicated to helping individuals bridge the partisan divide, and Isaac began attending the group’s events. “We need empathy for each other so we can build bridges,” Louisa said. “Empathy allows you to see the world in color versus black and white.”

For all of us to move back from the brink, the political atmosphere will need to shift toward a more radical interest in diverse viewpoints. We need to see these viewpoints as part of a complex social fabric rather than existential threats to our values and ourselves.

I am talking about holding on to one’s moral and ethical principles while replacing the rhetoric of right versus wrong or good versus evil with an approach known as relational ethics. Theorists like the philosopher Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph von Schelling and the psychologist Carol Gilligan have described relational ethics as situating the self within a larger network of interdependent subjects, each with its own valid perspective.

Relational ethical engagement with one another is rooted not in abstract moral principles alone but in a profound respect for the autonomy and depth of others’ experiences. I do believe that progressive ideological positions, at least in theory, are better set up to facilitate that kind of discourse, while conservative ideologies often promote submitting to strong men. But refusing to settle into a discourse of splitting is available to us all. Such an approach offers a pathway to transform the “us versus them” mind-set into “them are us.” This is the first step toward a psychological maturity that can help us counteract the desire to simplify and polarize, and move together toward repair.

**ORNA GURALNIK** is a clinical psychologist and psychoanalyst who is the therapist on the Showtime documentary series “Couples Therapy.”

## A maverick thinker

**CALDWELL, FROM PAGE 10** on these terms might carry the threat of imperial highhandedness and lost self-determination.

This insight gives us a context for understanding the persistent grievances of movements like Mr. Trump’s, and their equally persistent popularity. What happens on the imperial level also happens at the local level, within the United States and the Western European societies that make the rules of globalization. Non-technocrats, whether they are the resentful members of the old working class or just people wisecracking about the progressive pieties of corporate human resource managers, are not going to be permitted to tangle up the system with their demands.

As we no longer have an economic policy that is managed democratically, it should not be surprising that it produces unfair outcomes. Nor should it be surprising that in the wake of the mortgage crisis, Covid, the war in Ukraine and so-called Bidenflation, this unfairness would give rise to what Mr. Streeck calls “tendencies toward deglobalization” — such as those that emerged with a vengeance on Nov. 5.

The “global economy” is a place where common people have no leverage. Parties of the left lost sight of such problems after the 1970s, Mr. Streeck notes. They allowed their old structure, oriented around industrial workers and primarily concerned with workers’ rights and living standards, to be infiltrated and overturned by intellectuals, who were primarily concerned with promoting systems of values, such as

human rights and lately the set of principles known as wokeism.

It is in disputing the wisdom of this shift that Mr. Streeck is most likely to antagonize American Democrats and others who think of themselves (usually incorrectly) as belonging to the left. He, too, thinks that democracy is in crisis, but only because it is being thwarted by the very elites who purport to champion it. Among the people, democracy is thriving. After decades of decline in voter turnout, there has been a steep and steady rise in participation over the past 20 years — at least for parties

**Streeck argues that today’s contradictions of capitalism have been building for half a century.**

whose candidates reflect a genuine popular sentiment. As this has happened, liberal commentators — who tend to back what Mr. Streeck calls “parties of the standard model” — have changed their definition of democracy, he writes: They see high electoral participation as a troubling expression of discontent, “endangering rather than strengthening democracy.”

This new, topsy-turvy idea of democracy comes with a new political strategy. The interests and agendas of stand-ard-issue parties are increasingly reinforced by the media and other grandees of globalization. These actors have “fought against the new wave of politicization,” Mr. Streeck writes, “with the full arsenal of instruments at their disposal — propagandistic, cultural, legal, institutional.”

## Yiddish is thrillingly alive

**MCWHORTER, FROM PAGE 10** using a mix of the American verb and a Yiddish conjugation.

No one seems to mind. My friends tell me that older speakers do not criticize younger ones for using more English words. “Bloyz Yiddish” — “only” Yiddish — has its place, such as in conversations that people don’t want outsiders to understand, or in the pages of Chaya’s daughter’s illustrated books. But even Yiddish with an English word in almost every sentence is still very much Yiddish, because the grammar and the soul of the language remain intact.

Another striking quality is that written poetry occupies a more significant place in the cultural grammar of these Yiddish speakers than it does in that of modern America.

Until the 1930s or so, memorizing and reciting poems was such a common activity for mainstream American kids that I’d wager a lot of grandparents today could still recite William Ernest

Henley’s “Invictus.” The first decades of the N.A.A.C.P.’s magazine, “The Crisis,” included selections of poetry. The stage and film comedienne Marie Dressler paused during her vaudeville act in 1913 to recite the somber poem “When Baby Souls Sail Away.”

The centrality at that time of written poetry to American culture seems almost exotic now, replaced for the most part by hip-hop. But to the Yiddish-speaking ultra-Orthodox, written poetry is a common part of social exchange, neither antique nor rarified. Writing one another small poems on special occasions is a gesture of warmth and even courtesy. Chaya told me she received not one but several poems with each of her wedding gifts. People who lack the skill to compose a poem themselves may ask others to do it, including people who are paid for the service.

Yiddish, in other words, has always lived on, and not just in a nosh or a mensch or a wide array of colorful insults

that have seeped into English. Right here in the United States, always, children are being born to Yiddish, learning only later that there is a world beyond where people live in another language. The mame loshen, or mother tongue, is a part of the linguistic fabric of America.

By the way, the composer Alex Weiser has created lovely musical settings of (among other things) early-20th-century Yiddish poems about New York City at night, in his recording “In a Dark Blue Night.”

“Af di Palisadn rut di zun,/Varfnidik ir letstn, zisn blik/Dem farlozenem Hodson.”

“The sun rests on the Palisades/Casting her last, sweet glance/To the forlorn Hudson.” This, the opening of Morris Rosenfeld’s poem “Evening,” is the kind of poetry that almost demands music, and Weiser gives it to all of us.

**JOHN MCWHORTER** is an associate professor of linguistics at Columbia University.

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# International Homes

## Glass house that offers privacy

Architects find a way to open up more space for a couple in Barcelona

BY JULIE LASKY

In 2003, Monica Aguirre and Victor Ferrer inherited a four-story house in Barcelona, Spain, that was more than a century old and in poor condition. When they decided to move in four years later, they sold the top two floors to finance the renovation of the bottom half. By that time, they were expecting a child (within a couple of years, they would have two) and were focused on the things that would be useful to their growing family.

On the ground floor, in a room looking out to the rear patio, they created a combined kitchen, dining area and family room, where they could perform household tasks while the children played with their toys. In the backyard, they added a small swimming pool for relief in the scorching summers.

“It was a little bit crazy,” recalled Ms. Aguirre, 49, a psychologist. With the space limited to 1,300 square feet (120 square meters) on two floors, the couple understood that there would be sacrifices. Something had to give, and that something was a living room. For years, they didn’t have one.

As the children grew up, the lack of a ground-floor social space became nettlesome for both generations. Entertaining was a challenge. There was no place to watch a movie with a group of friends of any age. That’s when Eugeni Bach stepped in.

Mr. Bach is an architect who, with his wife and professional partner, Anna Bach, regularly socializes with Ms. Aguirre and Mr. Ferrer. He knows their interests, and he knows their home. When they turned to him for help, he recalled, he was able to skip past the usual battery of questions to clients — “How do you want to live? What kinds of objects do you like? Blah, blah, blah,” in his words — and knuckle down to providing the living room they had forgone for so long.

But where to put it? The answer was not intuitively obvious, but it made sense, once Mr. Bach laid out his plan.

The living room would take the place



PHOTOGRAPHS BY EUGENI BACH



**Maximum light**  
An addition features substantial wood dividers, while maintaining the light and views in the original rooms. Clockwise from above left: the new kitchen; the L-shaped addition; a home office in the short arm of the “L”; and built-in storage space.

of the kitchen, and the kitchen would move outside.

The architects conceived a glass annex, roughly L-shaped, extending from the rear of the house over a portion of the walled backyard, from which the pool was removed.

Within the long part of the L, they placed a narrow kitchen with wood cabinetry and wood-sheathed appliances and a ribbon of glass doors, many of which open to the tiled patio and garden.

The kitchen is wider toward the entrance where the sink is, so that more than one person can maneuver comfortably around it, whereas the patio widens

toward the rear, where there is room for seating under a lovely tree.

Because both Ms. Aguirre and Mr. Ferrer, 54, a businessman, often work from home, the stub of the L contains a desk with the same outdoor view and access. (A second-floor room also functions as an office, so each of them has a space to work without distracting the other.)

A glass roof crowns the entire addition. This feature, Mr. Bach said, was made possible by the home’s northern orientation and by the placement of surrounding buildings and trees, which prevented sunbeams from hitting the glass

**The glass ensured that the ground floor’s existing open-plan interior kept its light and views.**

directly and roasting the family. The inner layer of the double-pane roof is corrugated to screen views from the top two floors and to mask the leaves and dirt that invariably settle on horizontal surfaces. (From below, any detritus looks pleasantly like shadows.)

In combination with the narrow width of the addition, the glass ensured that the ground floor’s existing open-plan interior kept its light and views. “In the end,” Mr. Bach said, “you have a very good kitchen, a very good studio, a very good living room and a very good dining room that all face the patio.”

And yet, he noted, though architectur-

al modernists champion the erasure of boundaries between inside and outside, too much glass can make inhabitants feel vulnerable to what lies beyond their walls.

“You have the feeling that you are not wrapped, that you are not taken care of, by your own building,” he said. It is the difference between “showing you the outside and pushing you outside.”

This led the architects to design substantial wood dividers between the panes. The door frames are green to echo the tree leaves, and the trim that edges the glass is red orange, the same color as the new ceramic patio tiles.

Though they didn’t alter the plan of the house’s older portion, the architects softened the transition between the entrance and the living/dining room with a custom piece of casework that serves as a coat closet on one side and a living room cabinet on the other. They also designed a long dining bench that flips open for storage, along with a credenza and bookshelves.

After some pandemic-related delays, the project was completed at the end of 2021 at a cost of about \$128,000. Since then, Ms. Aguirre and Mr. Ferrer have seated up to 25 people at annual Christmas parties (a tight squeeze) into the room where their babies once played.

The children, who are now 17 and 16, were a little upset at the loss of their swimming pool, Ms. Aguirre said, but it was their turn to make a sacrifice. “They understand that they will leave and we will stay,” she said. “The house is for us.”

WHAT YOU GET | MICHAEL KAMINER

## \$650,000 homes in Normandy, France



ENGEL & VÖLKERS PARIS MMC

### Le Breuil-en-Auge

€595,000 (\$628,000)

*A renovated thatched-roof cottage with views of the Vallée d’Auge*

Made of mud and straw, the thatched roof atop this four-bedroom, one-bathroom cottage is designed to retain heat during winter and to cool the interiors in the summer. The sellers, a couple from the south of France, bought the 1970s house from a French architect who completed an extensive renovation in 2022.

Le Breuil-en-Auge is set in a lush section of Calvados, a department in the Normandy region of northwestern France. Its population of about 1,000 includes many second-home owners. La Spiriterie Française, Château du Breuil, a local distillery in a 400-year-old castle, draws tourists from around the world for its Calvados, or apple brandy. Le Dauphin, a restaurant in the village, is known for its modern Norman cuisine. Supermarkets and a hospital are about six miles (10 kilometers) away in the town of Pont l’Évêque, the eponymous birthplace of the rich Norman cheese. Paris is 120 miles east.

**SIZE:** 1,528 square feet (142 square meters)

**PRICE PER SQUARE FOOT:** \$411

**INDOORS:** The ground floor, with restored hardwood floors and painted ceiling beams, includes the living

room, the dining area and the kitchen. The living room is anchored by a stone fireplace and chimney that were installed during the renovation. A dark, unpainted wood beam accents the kitchen, which has blue cabinetry and hardwood countertops. A small garage was converted to a sitting room off the dining area; its original doors add an industrial touch.

All three bedrooms are on the second floor, along with the home’s sole bathroom. The primary bedroom features white beamed ceilings, painted wood floors and windows overlooking greenery on the side of the house. The bathroom has tiled floors, a stand-alone tub, double sinks and a glassed-in shower.

The renovation added new plumbing, electrical and heating systems. Furniture is available by separate negotiation.

**OUTDOOR SPACE:** The house sits on one landscaped acre (0.40 hectares). A long patio with a colorful garden runs along the back of the house. There is a small storage shed with a carport near the home’s entrance.

**COSTS:** Annual property taxes are €900 (\$950). Home buyers in France pay notary fees of 7.5 percent of the purchase price. The total cost of the home includes agency commissions.

**CONTACT:** Nathalie de Marez Dubuc, Engel & Völkers Paris, 011-33-6-08-09-14-54, engelvoelkers.com



MERCURE FORBES GLOBAL PROPERTIES

### Carcagny

€638,000 (\$674,000)

*Two houses conjoined by a modern glass addition to form a country manor*

With a glass pavilion added 20 years ago, the owners of this stone house in the tiny village of Carcagny linked two adjacent houses to create a six-bedroom, three-bathroom mini-manor. The older building, dating to the early 20th century, has a stone facade; the other, several decades younger, is finished in lime plaster.

Carcagny is about five miles (eight kilometers) southeast of Bayeux, the first major town to be liberated by the Allies in the D-Day invasion, and a starting point for many visitors retracing the World War II landings in Normandy. Caen, another key D-Day site with a busy town center, is about 14 miles southeast of Carcagny. Caen’s train station offers direct routes to Paris, about 150 miles east. Ferries also operate from Caen to Portsmouth, England. Since Carcagny is solely residential, villagers travel to Caen or Bayeux for services, dining and shopping.

**SIZE:** 2,734 square feet (254 square meters)

**PRICE PER SQUARE FOOT:** \$246

**INDOORS:** The sellers used a covered terrace off the older structure as a main entrance. The entry hall features original stone walls and leads to a

great room with dining and living spaces. The adjoining open kitchen has an island and a small wine cellar. A double-sided fireplace divides the kitchen and the living room. Original wood ceiling beams throughout have been restored; tiled floors are new. The glassed-in section of the property has polished concrete floors and includes a sitting area, a laundry area and a half bathroom.

The older part of the home has three levels. On the second floor are two bedrooms with cathedral ceilings, including a principal bedroom with en suite bathroom. A teak landing connects to two bedrooms in the newer section of the home. Those bedrooms share a bathroom. The third floor has another bedroom, and a sixth, larger bedroom is in the home’s attic, with an en suite bathroom bedecked in 1970s-style brown and yellow tiles.

**OUTDOOR SPACE:** The 375-square-foot swimming pool is in front of the house, along with a 1,000-square-foot stone terrace. The 0.3-acre (0.12-hectare) property also features a large vegetable garden and fruit trees. There are two small storage buildings behind the house.

**COSTS:** Annual property taxes are €1,350 (\$1,425).

**CONTACT:** Laurence Ardant, Mercure Forbes Global Properties, 011-33-6-62-18-73-65, groupe-mercure.fr



ENGEL & VÖLKERS PARIS MMC

### Villerville

€590,000 (\$623,000)

*A restored 19th-century fisherman’s cottage near Villerville Beach*

Typical of older homes in coastal Normandy villages, this three-story fisherman’s cottage was built in the late 19th century and redesigned, in this case by the Deauville-based architect Laura Salomon Wagner in 2019. The home is on a quiet side street in the center of Villerville, a hamlet in the Calvados department that is a popular weekend and holiday spot for second-home owners in France. Built on a cliff with views of the Seine estuary, Villerville was the home of French artists including the painter Charles Mozin and the composer Gabriel Fauré.

Villerville Beach is a short walk from the home, as is Le Bistro Fleuri, a fish-and-chips joint popular with locals. Every autumn, fireworks on the beach commemorate the 1962 Jean Gabin film “Un Singe en Hiver,” which was shot in Villerville. Deauville, with its upscale hotels, casinos and horse racing, is five miles south. The stately seaside resort of Trouville-sur-Mer, with its rows of Belle Époque buildings, is three miles (five kilometers) southwest. The Gare de Trouville train station, with direct links to Paris, is about four miles southwest.

**SIZE:** 1,076 square feet (100 square meters)

**PRICE PER SQUARE FOOT:** \$579

**INDOORS:** The front door opens to a living room with hardwood floors and a sleek wood-burning stove. A small dining area opens to the compact kitchen, which is brightened by a skylight. Built by the French custom workshop Atelier de St. Paul, the kitchen features marble countertops and tall gray cabinets that conceal smart appliances.

A restored hardwood staircase ascends to the second floor and two bedrooms. One has a sloped ceiling, painted floors and abstract nautical wallpaper; the other offers access to a small terrace through glass doors. A shared bathroom, clad in gray tiles, includes a glassed-in shower. The primary bedroom is one floor up, along with a large bathroom with sloped ceilings, marble floors, a stand-alone tub and a glass shower stall.

The home’s restoration included new electrical and plumbing systems, along with underfloor heating. It is being sold furnished.

**OUTDOOR SPACE:** The second-story terrace is about 100 square feet; its glass floor doubles as the kitchen skylight.

**TAXES:** Annual property taxes total €826 (\$870).

**CONTACT:** Sandra Sabah, Engel & Völkers Paris, 011-33-6-68-84-54-97, engelvoelkers.com



# SCIENCE LAB

SABER-TOOTH

## Kitty with a bite

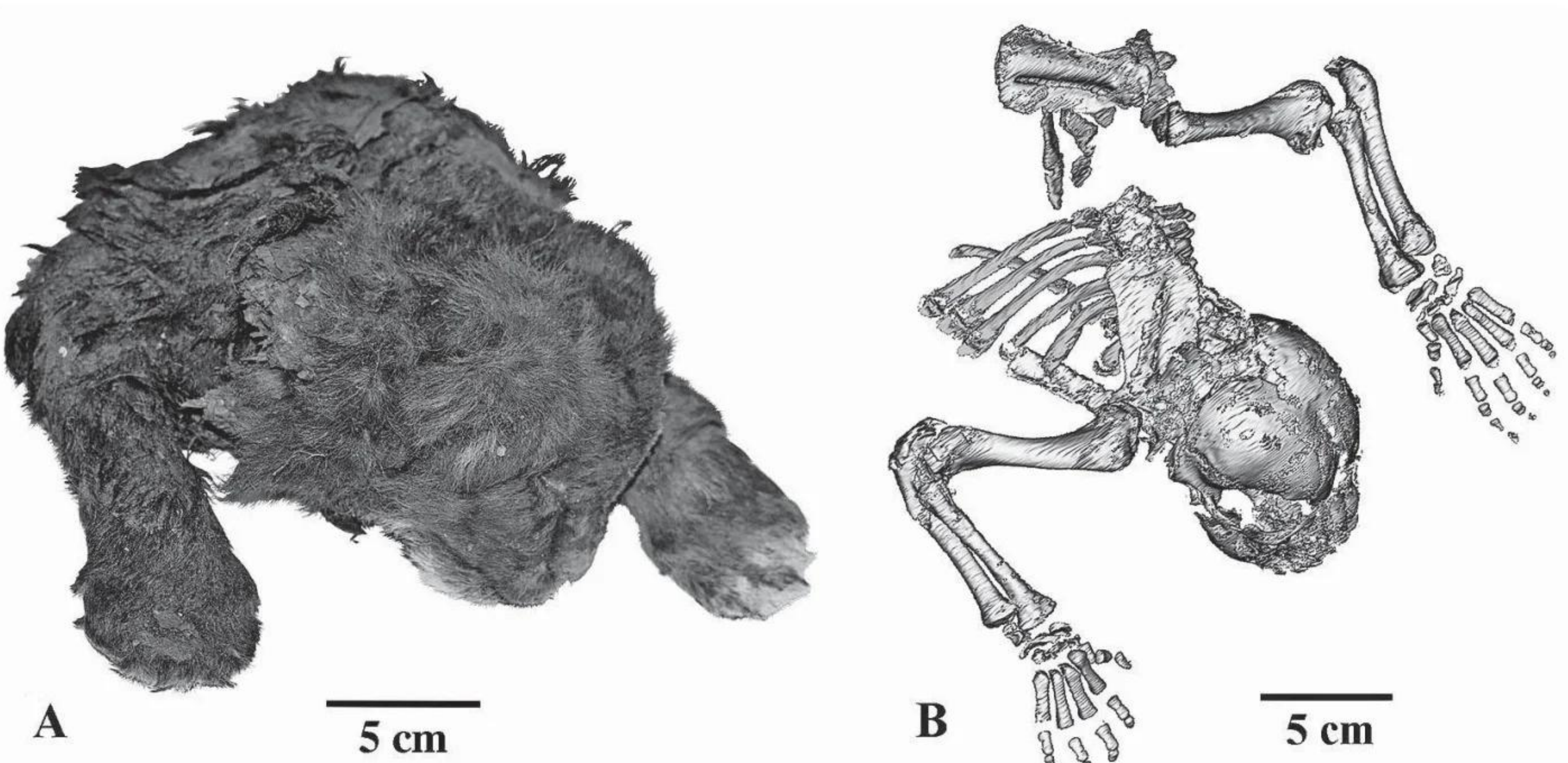
In 2020, prospectors seeking mammoth tusks in eastern Siberia found a bundle of fur protruding from the icy bank of the Badyarikha River.

The diggers knew they were looking at something rare: the Ice Age mummy of a cat cub.

Scientists have studied mummified animals that roamed the steppes in the Pleistocene 30,000 years ago. These have included titans like mammoths and woolly rhinoceroses, as well as small mammals like the cubs of wolverines and cave lions. But when the prospectors took their little find to the Russian Academy of Sciences in Moscow, researchers there were delighted: They had just been handed the first-ever mummy of a saber-toothed cat.

The find, published in the journal *Scientific Reports*, was the first in 28,000 years in which humans laid eyes on a saber-toothed cat — at least since their extinction at the end of the ice age.

Along with his colleagues, Alexey Lopatin, a paleontologist in Russia and an author on the paper, confirmed that the 37,000-year-old mummy was a *Homotherium*, which would have grown up to be a rangy, lion-size cat with long forelimbs and heavy shoulders. The species was the last of the saber-toothed cats, which occupied a branch on the tree of life distinct from modern felines. *ASHER ELBEIN*



A.V. LOPATIN ET AL., SCIENTIFIC REPORTS 2024



MIDLEVEL MOBILITY

## It seemed to be just a slug, but scientists caught it swimming

Bruce Robison, a marine biologist, has long used robotic vehicles to explore the Monterey Canyon off California — a gargantuan rift in the Pacific seabed that descends rapidly from coastal shallows to a depth of more than two miles (3.2 kilometers). In early 2000, he stumbled on a strange creature he had never seen before.

“We had no idea what it was,” Dr. Robison recalled.

The gelatinous blob had a giant hood at one end, fingerlike projections at the other and colorful internal organs in between. Baffled, Dr. Robison and a colleague at the Monterey Bay Aquarium Research Institute set out to discover what it was.

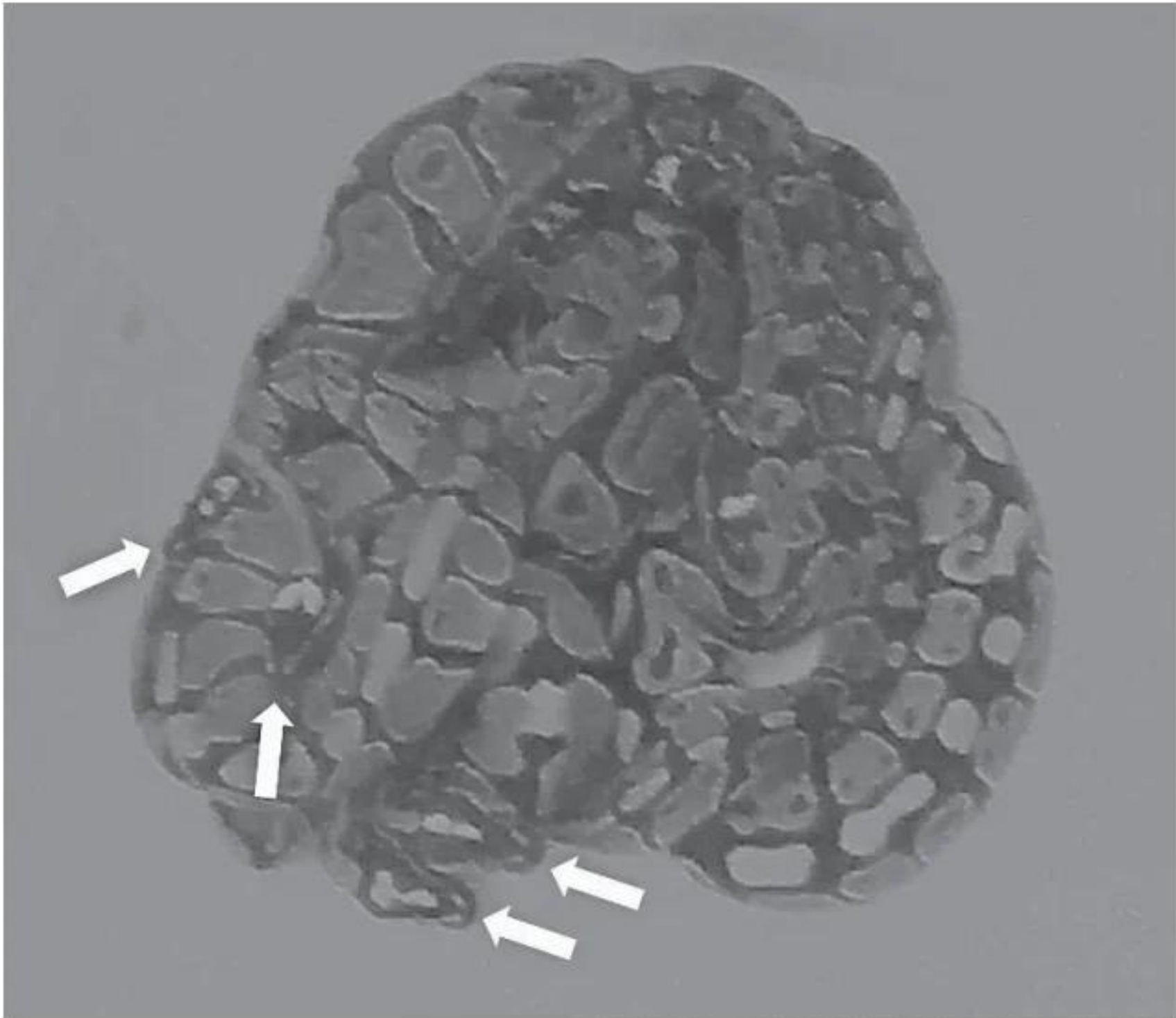
A quarter-century later, having studied 157 of the enigmatic organisms in their dark habitats, as well as in the laboratory, the two scientists are making their conclusions public. The newly identified creature, they reported recently, represents a whole new family of living things that reside in the midnight world of the ocean’s vast midwaters — the largest and least explored part of the planet’s biosphere. Moreover, it looks and behaves unlike any of its closest relatives on the tree of life.

The discoverers say the creature is a surprising new kind of nudibranch, or sea slug. Nudibranchs (Latin for “naked gills”) get their name from that fact that they’re nude, unlike their cousins on land — snails.

What sets the organism apart from its marine relatives — and what makes the discovery so astonishing — is that it swims. Most nudibranchs known to science previously were described as inching their way over coral reefs, sea grass beds, kelp forests, the deep seafloor and rocky tide pools.

But Dr. Robison and his colleague, Steven Haddock, found that the newly identified creature is neutrally buoyant — that is, it can float effortlessly underwater, neither sinking nor rising. Striking video footage shows how, in that weightless state, it moves gracefully through its dark habitat, slowly undulating its entire body up and down.

For more dramatic motion, the scientists found, it can also expel water rapidly from its hood, producing jet-like bursts that send it moving quickly backward to escape predators. *WILLIAM J. BROAD*



NOAM MILLER AND MORGAN SKINNER/WILFRID LAURIER UNIVERSITY

SLITHERING SOCIALITES

## Ball pythons show researchers they like their lives intertwined

The ball python does not seem like a snake with hidden depths. A small African python, it is the second most popular pet reptile in the world, beloved for its rich colors, intricate patterns and docile temper. It is easily bred and almost always kept alone.

“People don’t think of certain snakes as social at all, especially in the reptile hobby,” said Morgan Skinner, a quantitative ecologist who studied at Wilfrid Laurier University in Ontario. “And they tend to keep them alone or isolated, because of these pre-conceptions.”

But in a study published recently in the journal *Behavioral Ecology and Sociobiology*, Dr. Skinner and his colleagues show that ball pythons are much more cuddly with one another than anyone had guessed.

The study of snake social behavior has been undergoing a renaissance over the past few years, said Noam Miller, who is an author on the paper and also at Wilfrid Laurier. Researchers have tended to focus on garter snakes and rattlesnakes, both of which give birth to live young, spend winters together massed in dens and form “friendships” during active seasons.

But while working on his doctorate in Dr. Miller’s lab, Dr. Skinner began wondering how snakes not known to be social interacted with one another.

Because ball pythons lay eggs, rather than having live births and have no need to hibernate, they seemed like the perfect study candidate.

In 2020, Dr. Skinner and his colleague Tamara Kumpan placed a mixed-sex group of six pythons for 10 days in a large enclosure — one with enough plastic shelters for each snake — and left a camera running.

To Dr. Skinner’s shock, all six snakes quickly squeezed together in the same shelter and spent over 60 percent of their time together. Assuming that all of the snakes had simply liked something about that specific shelter, the team removed it. But after some initial confusion, the snakes chose another home base in which to curl up together.

As the team repeated the experiment over the next few years — with five different cohorts of young pythons — the pattern held. Twice a day, Dr. Skinner came in and shuffled the snakes. He put them in the middle of the enclosure. He placed individual pythons under different shelters to force them to go find one another.

Over and over, the snakes chose to pile up, rather than coil alone.

When snakes left to explore the enclosure, they often left together. And though males tended to wander more than females, they always returned to the home base.

“That blew my mind,” Dr. Skinner said. “I was not expecting that from a snake I wasn’t expecting to be social.”

In fact, Dr. Miller said, the ball pythons were more social than garter snakes. The team’s past research has shown that garters can be surprisingly cliquish, with individual snakes showing clear preferences about whom they spend time with. The juvenile ball pythons, however, didn’t appear to care much whom they denned with. “They just wanted to be together all the time, in one shelter,” Dr. Skinner said. *ASHER ELBEIN*

“When someone tells you that you have cancer, you feel like you have to do something.”

Dr. Adewole S. Adamson, an author of a new paper that suggests that pancreatic cancer may have been overdiagnosed in recent years, leading to more surgical interventions.



# Sports

## He was the ‘lone ranger’ of N.F.L. analytics

LAKE ELMO, MINN.

Mike Eayrs is credited with popularizing football data science in the 1980s

BY ALEC LEWIS  
THE ATHLETIC

When he retired from the Green Bay Packers nine years ago, Mike Eayrs plucked folders from file cabinets and tried to figure out what he could actually take. So many of the documents were proprietary: Hundreds of color-coded spreadsheets, in highlighter yellows and electric greens, the most detailed information imaginable about every National Football League opponent.

For years, one of Eayrs’s many duties was creating these laminated game-day cheat sheets you see coaches referring to on the sidelines during games. They contain countless data points about each opposing coach: the play calls he prefers in certain situations, how his game plan would shift depending on the score and how quickly he would unveil it during a game.

Walking away from his role as the Packers’ director of research and development, Eayrs did not need any of these relics, though he might be interested in a keepsake or two. Eventually, he grabbed one file, the one he had compiled ahead of Super Bowl XLV, the Packers’ victory over the Pittsburgh Steelers.

“This is it,” Eayrs, 73, said, sliding it over the kitchen counter in his home near Minneapolis.

Nothing about the appearance of Eayrs’s home hints at his former life as an N.F.L. visionary, a man viewed by many as the father of football analytics and referred to in hushed tones as the secret weapon in the Packers’ rivalry with the Minnesota Vikings.

He scanned through his keepsake and talked about the 2011 Steelers. How their defensive coordinator, Dick LeBeau, played Cover 3 on 91 percent of their snaps, and how Packers coaches used this tidbit of information to their advantage in making in-game decisions.

That’s how Eayrs viewed his role, first with the Vikings, then with their enemies to the east: decision support. He did not set out to work in what is now widely known as analytics. In fact, when Eayrs stumbled into all of this in the 1980s, there was no such thing.

“Mike was a lone ranger,” said the former coach Brian Billick, who won a Super Bowl as coach of the Baltimore Ravens. “He was theorizing some of the stuff we talk about now 40 years ago. He was so far ahead of the curve.”

Before they built a sleek practice facility in the Twin Cities, the Vikings held training camp at the state university campus in Mankato. After practice,



Mike Eayrs, left, his wife, Mary Jo, center, and their family after the Green Bay Packers’ victory over the Pittsburgh Steelers in Super Bowl XLV in 2011.

Vikings coaches often crossed paths with the Minnesota State coaches. Once, in the early 1980s, the college’s head coach suggested that some of the Vikings coaches should sit down with one of his assistants, Eayrs.

Les Steckel and Floyd Reese, the Vikings assistants, were soon in Eayrs’s office. They had heard that Eayrs had been studying regression lines and standard deviation charts relating to football.

“Show us some of the things you got,” one of them said.

Eayrs nodded nervously. He sifted through some papers, wondering where to start. He began as simply as possible. He explained that Minnesota State had gone 3-7 the year before and that he had watched the film of all 10 games, trying to identify patterns in the wins and losses.

“The thing that emerged right away was ball security,” Eayrs told them. “We threw interceptions and fumbled the ball.”

Steckel and Reese didn’t see this as much of a revelation, knowing that turnover margin correlated with wins and losses.

So Eayrs took a different approach. Wanting to make the conversation more interactive, rather than one dominated by someone acting like a math-obsessed

know-it-all, Eayrs asked, “Do you know how long the average possession is?”

Reese, a defensive coach, replied, “You get a lot of three-and-outs.”

Steckel, the offensive coach, interjected, “But there’s a lot of 10-play drives, too.”

“In a way, both of you are right,” Eayrs recalled saying. “The mean number of plays in a drive is 5.8.” (Nearly 40 years later in 2024, the average number of plays per drive is 5.71.)

“I’m the offensive play caller,” Eayrs said. “I tell myself every time we take the field, I’ve got to have a plan in my mind of how we’re going to get from where we’re starting to scoring position in six plays or less.”

“Why do you do that?” Steckel responded.

In an instant, the coaches had gone from skeptical to curious.

“If you look at the three games we won,” Eayrs said, “what happened was, somewhere in that possession, we had a long gain. Your goal as a play caller is to empower your men to set the circumstances up to get the big gain.”

In a nonintuitive way, he was explaining the impact of explosive plays on wins and losses.

Eayrs then asked them how much their play calling changed, depending on the score of the game. Did they ac-

count for score differential when scouting their opponent’s tendencies?

Steckel and Reese looked at one another before shaking their heads: “No.”

“You’re missing one of the most important variables of the game,” Eayrs said. “The score has a distinct relationship with strategy.”

Over the next few years, Eayrs compiled data packets and sent them to N.F.L. teams. The Dallas Cowboys executive Gil Brandt called to pick his brain.

“He was theorizing some of the stuff we talk about now 40 years ago. He was so far ahead.”

Lou Holtz, then coach of the University of Minnesota, invited him to a meeting and asked, “What are you trying to do with this?” Eayrs told him he hoped to establish a consultant business so he could take his family on a nice vacation.

“You keep producing these tables with numbers,” Eayrs said Holtz told him, “and before you’re done, you’ll take your family on the greatest vacation you’ve ever known.”

A couple of years later, in June 1985, the Vikings did the inevitable. At the urging of the coaching staff, they hired a man who had neither played nor

coached in the N.F.L. To do what exactly? Eayrs didn’t fully know.

Eayrs’s job evolved over time. In his first season with the Vikings, the defensive staff was developing a new package. The coaches argued constantly, but a consensus formed around the information Eayrs presented.

In general, Vikings Coach Bud Grant disliked relying on data. Eayrs initially printed packets of information and placed them on Grant’s desk. Grant rarely acknowledged Eayrs’s insights, so Eayrs dipped into his own back story, to what had intrigued him about football data in the first place.

When he was hired at Minnesota State in Mankato, Eayrs was asked to teach a class nobody else wanted to teach: statistics. The subject bored students and professors. From the outset, he vowed to find a textbook that did not read like rocket science, one that would allow the students to apply the subject to something fun, like sports.

The class was segmented into groups, and the one studying the N.F.L. discovered that the standard deviation curve was abnormally high in the middle with two long tails at the end. According to Eayrs, that meant there were 26 similarly talented teams clustered in the middle, and there were three outliers on both ends of the spectrum.

“What I used to tell the coaching staff in our meetings was, ‘You can be an optimist or you can be a pessimist,’” Eayrs said. “Basically, if you’re an optimist, we’re sitting in this room, and we only have to figure out how to make eight to 10 crucial plays at the right time, and we’re going to be in the playoffs. And if you’re a pessimist, we are eight to 10 plays away from the abyss. The difference in that middle spectrum of teams really boils down to who can do the right thing at the right time.”

While the early studies shaped Eayrs’s perspective of the N.F.L., it also helped him connect with Grant. The simpler the information, the more he believed Grant would listen. So he exchanged tables and charts for quick bullet points. Soon Grant started knocking more frequently on his door.

“Have you got a minute?” Grant would ask.

“What was I going to say to Bud Grant? No?” Eayrs said.

Once, Grant sat across from Eayrs’s desk and said: “You know, we put an awful lot of work into practice, but I don’t really think we’re practicing as efficiently as we could. Is there anything you can think of that would help us?”

Eayrs decided that he and a handful of assistants would jot down the plays called during practice, the defensive fronts used, the coverages deployed and the results of the plays.

Vikings coaches listened. And, over time, other organizations also started paying attention to Eayrs’s insights.

Then, in 2001, after 16 seasons with the Vikings, Eayrs made a change. Coach Mike Sherman wanted someone who could gather, organize and filter information and help the Packers make better in-game and off-field decisions. He knew that Eayrs and the Vikings were far ahead of the curve.

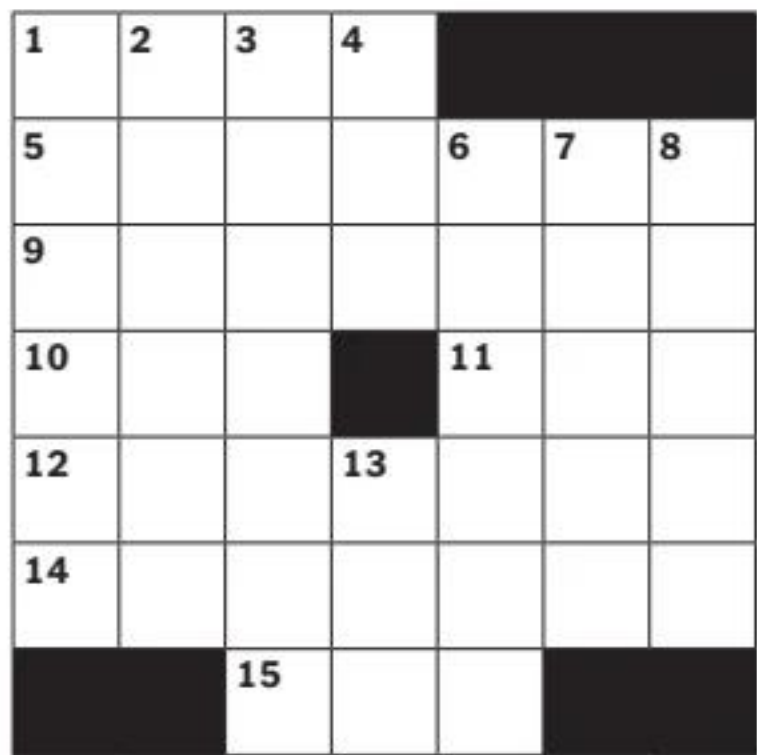
Sherman remained the head coach until 2005. Mike McCarthy was hired a year later and not only kept Eayrs on, but also asked him to bury himself in business strategy.

Eayrs identified two areas. The first was a study produced by the now defunct Bemis Company, which transformed its strategy to offer more autonomy to its factory workers. The second was a report from Southwest Airlines explaining that its customer service was enhanced by giving gate attendants the power to issue refunds to passengers.

Essentially, Eayrs believed that the more the players on the field controlled the decision-making, the better off Green Bay would be. He even referenced an old Grant line, that decision makers should come from the middle of the field.

So much of Eayrs’s work was like this — unknown and never written about, but with resounding impact. And Holtz no doubt would be happy to know that the Eayrs family has been able to take some memorable vacations.

## The Mini Crossword



11/30/2024 BY WYNA LIU EDITED BY SAM ERSKY

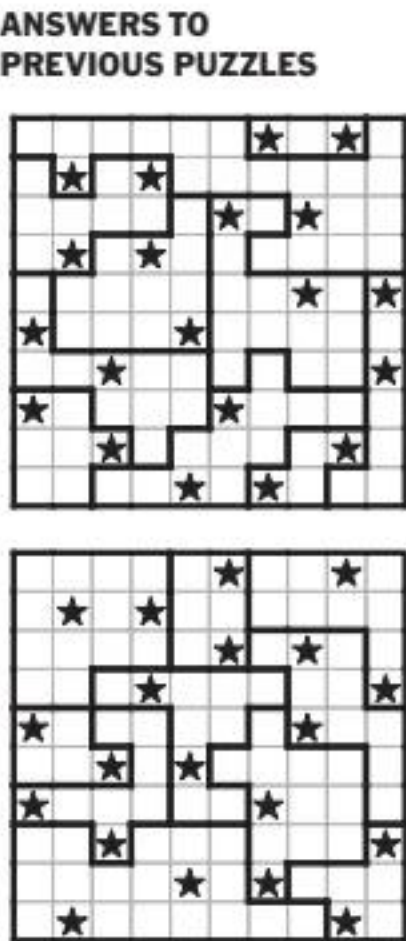
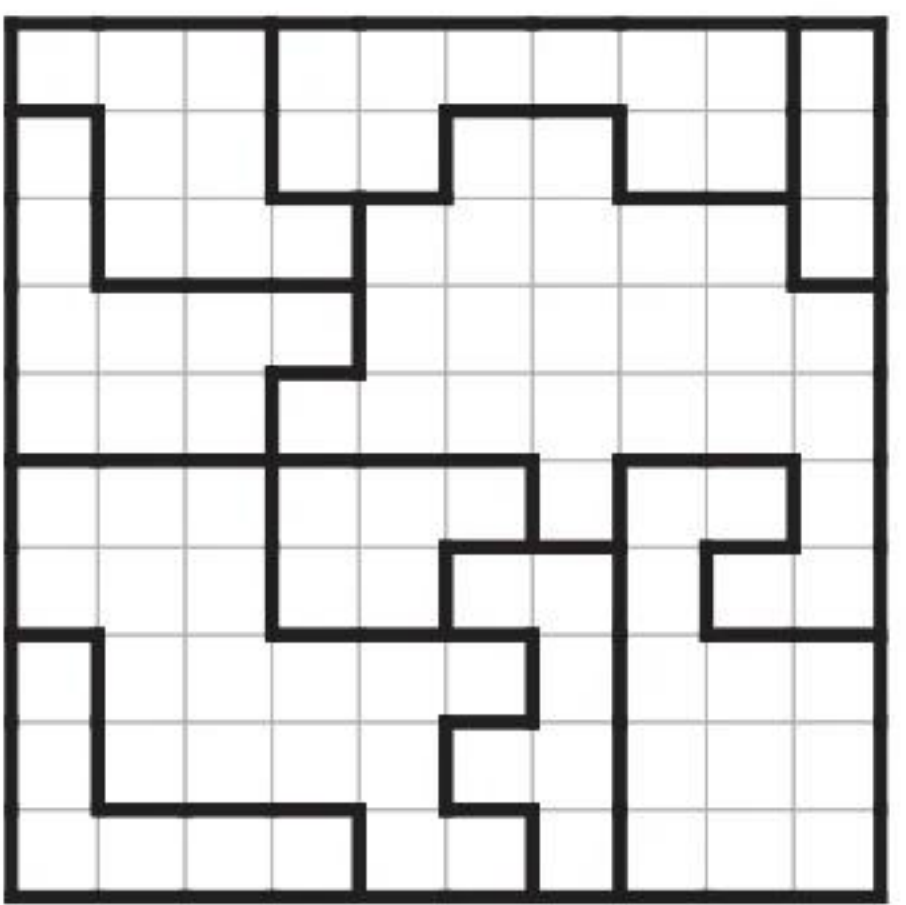
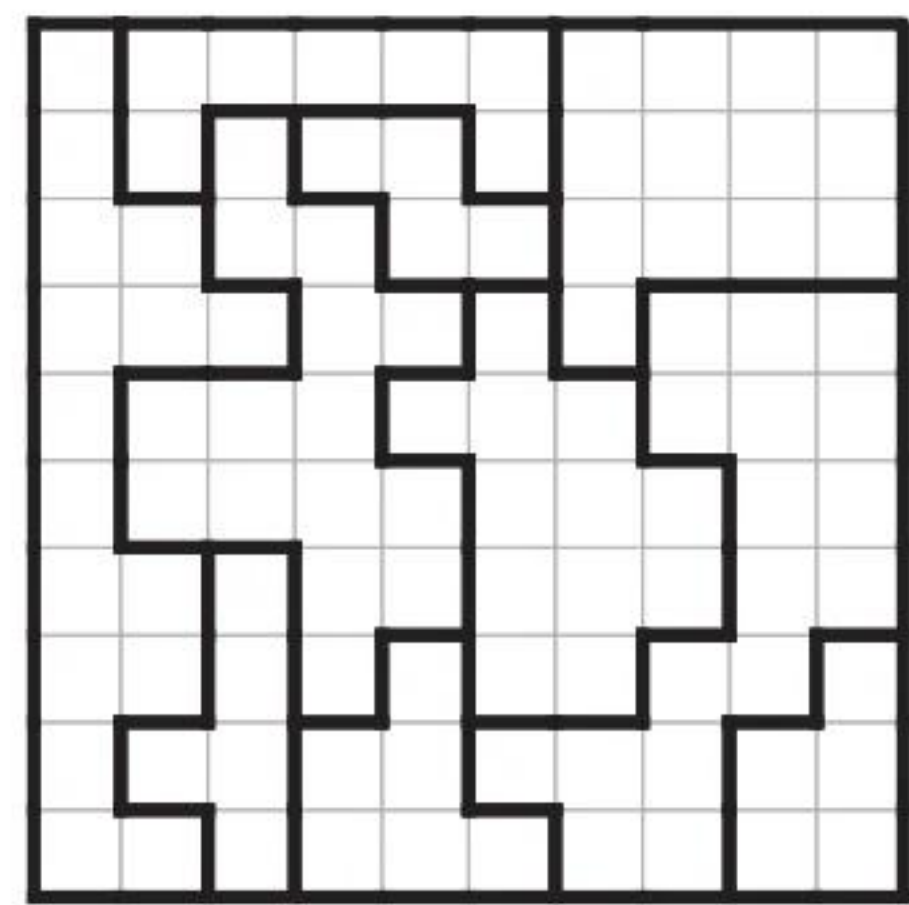
- ACROSS**
- Bro and sis, e.g.
  - Range that divides Europe into wet northern and dry southern climates
  - Beef and lamb, but not chicken or turkey
  - “Say \_\_\_!” (doctor’s request)
  - By way of
  - It’s a gift
  - Old-fashioned way to attach documents
  - “\_\_\_ Kapital”

- DOWN**
- What a tube top lacks
  - Radio streaming network since 2008, familiarly
  - Do first thing in the morning?
  - \_\_\_ the Eagle, Muppet who once thought “The Sound of Music” was written by Shakespeare
  - Video game segments
  - “Common Sense” writer Thomas
  - Fantasy sports fodder
  - Place for a body scrub

ANSWER TO PREVIOUS PUZZLE

D U C K  
E M A I L  
C A B L E  
A M I N O  
F I N S

## Two Not Touch



Put two stars in each row, column and region of the grid. No two stars may touch, not even diagonally.

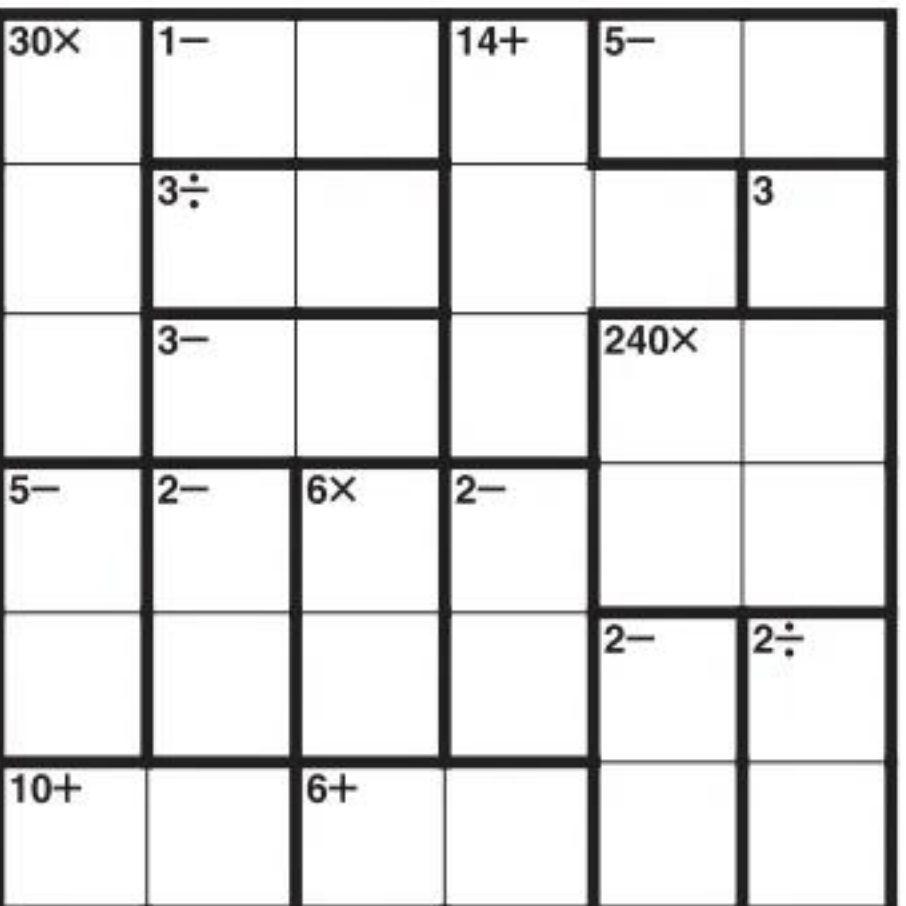
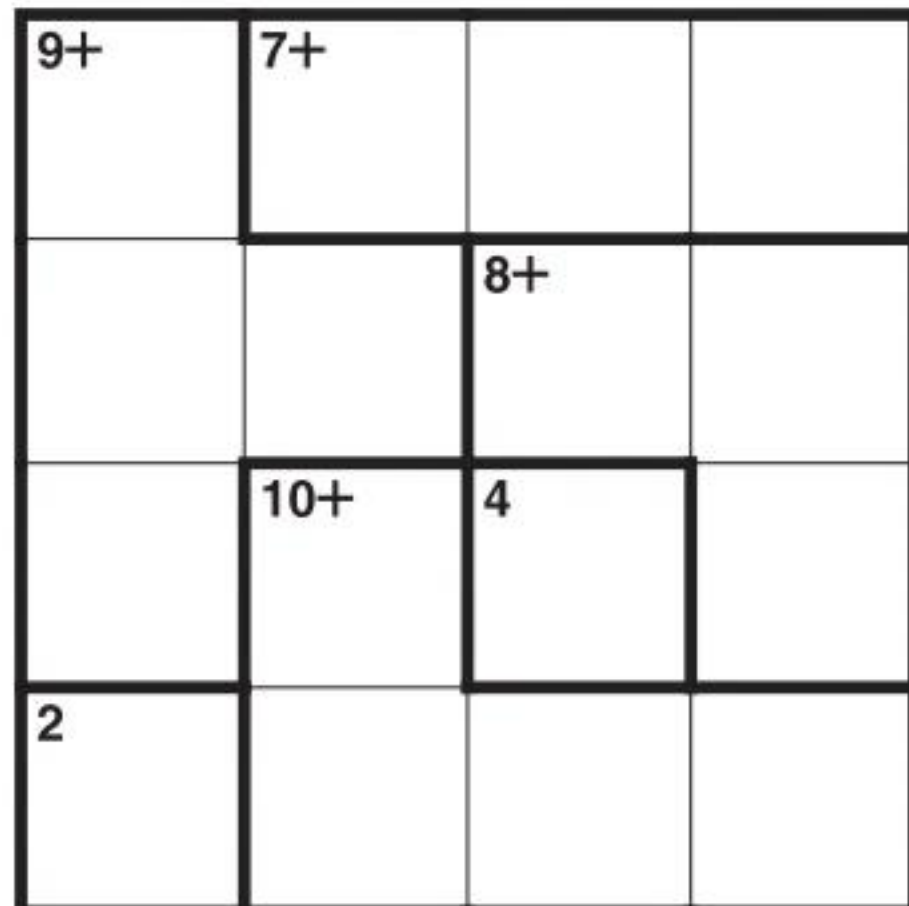
## Wit Twister

Beside the \_\_\_\_\_ River, in a lonely \_\_\_\_\_ of trees  
The \_\_\_\_\_ of his misfortunes brought a Texan to his knees.  
But then a quiet voice he heard: “Today you didn’t win,  
Yet he who \_\_\_\_\_ with pain and loss will rise to fight again.”

Complete the verse with words that are anagrams of each other. Each underline represents a letter.

PUZZLE BY STUART CLELAND  
YESTERDAY’S ANSWER Martina Navratilova

## KenKen



Fill the grid with digits so as not to repeat a digit in any row or column, and so that the digits within each heavily outlined box will produce the target number shown, by using addition, subtraction, multiplication or division, as indicated in the box. A 4x4 grid will use the digits 1-4. A 6x6 grid will use 1-6.

For more games: [www.nytimes.com/games](http://www.nytimes.com/games)

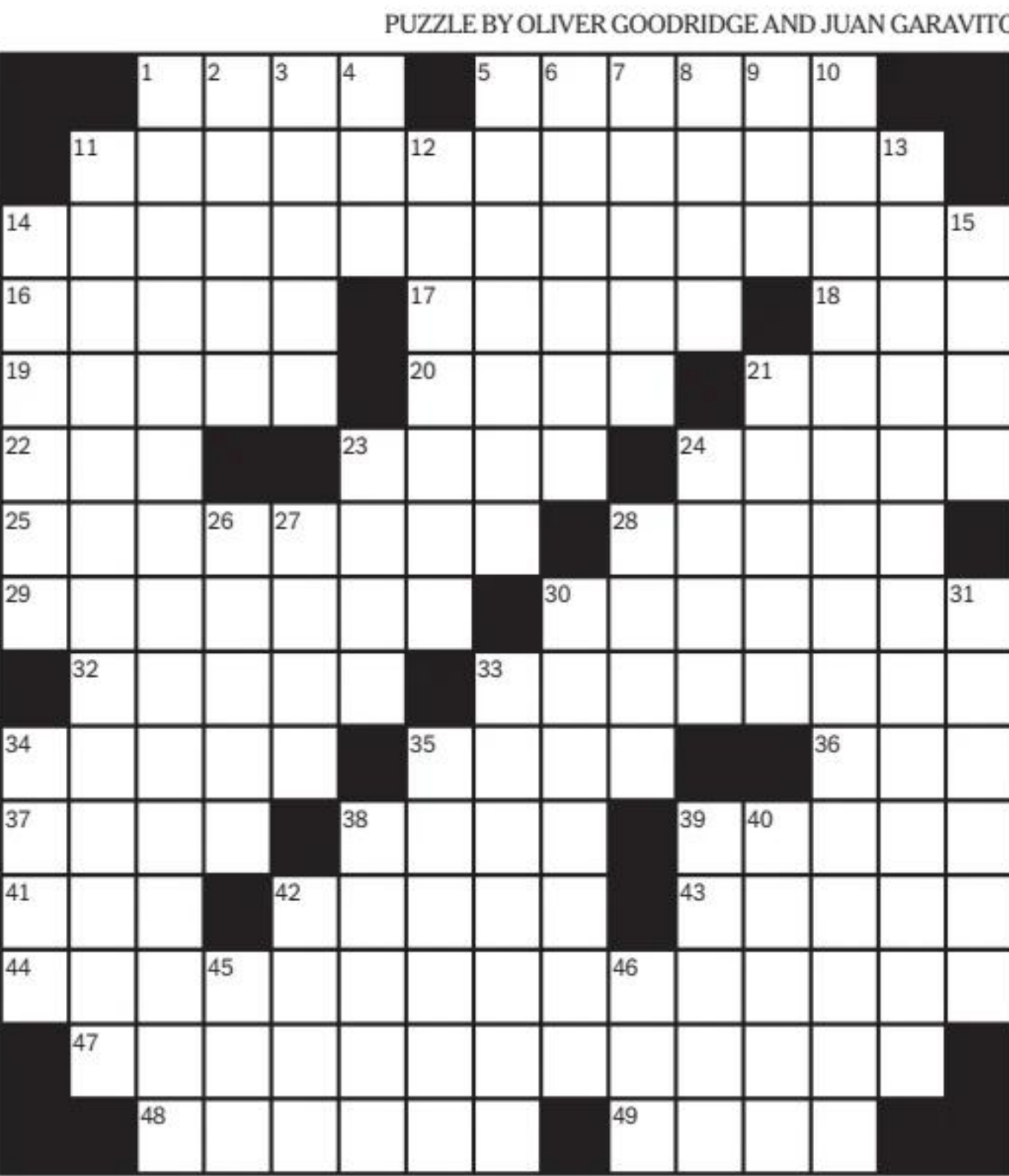
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## Crossword Edited by Joel Fagliano

- ACROSS**
- Handle of a knife
  - “And ...?”
  - “Say ...”
  - Haughty self-important question
  - Boast in a 1987 Michael Jackson hit
  - Airport transports, perhaps
  - Export from Jamaica
  - “Nature always the colors of the spirit”: Ralph Waldo Emerson
  - Petite \_\_\_\_
  - Number of fingers on dos mannos
  - Recipe fig.
  - Be all in a tizzy
  - Complicated
  - Ready to rinse, say
  - Shared
  - Cooks up, so to speak
  - Horse race measures
  - Went wrong
  - Painting technique in which the artist applies new paint atop a just-painted layer
  - Etc., etc.
  - Longtime candy company based in San Francisco
  - Color akin to amarillo
  - Cart for the Budweiser Clydesdales, e.g.
  - Speck
  - Termite, e.g.
  - Fired (up), in old slang
  - Japanese game using pentagonal pieces
  - Jack \_\_\_\_, Best Supporting Actor nominee for 1940’s “The Great Dictator”
  - Fateful encounter
  - Where cold cases are frequently opened
  - Nearly every third baseman and shortstop in M.L.B. history
  - Sign of hunger

ANSWER TO PREVIOUS PUZZLE

S C R A T C H T H A T R N S  
A R E Y O U A W A K E E A U  
N O T I M E T O D I E A M P  
T S A B U T N U C L E I  
A S I S P I L S P A T O N  
F E L T S P U N K N O N E  
E S S E N E M A C A B R E  
W A X F I G U R E  
C O M P I L E P A R K A S  
S A T E T A R S B R I T A  
A L T A R P E E R A N T I  
L O O T E D R A S P U N  
A R M C A S E I N P O I N T  
R I A O V E R A B A R R E L  
Y E N N E A R L Y R E A D Y



11/30/24

- DOWN**
- At-home distraction?
  - Like the crowd after a buzzer beater, say
  - Quarrels
  - Sound accompanying a shake of the head
  - Attacked, as a castle
  - “Hang on a second ...”
  - Request to be impressed
  - Expressions of befuddlement
  - Since
  - Breakup line
  - End result of a starter
  - The so-called “heart of the scorpion” in the night sky
  - Assumes control
  - Holiday honoring Lakshmi, the Hindu goddess of fortune
  - Hard to navigate
  - Stoop (to)
  - Mr. Rogers, to his neighbors
  - Prefix from the Greek for “alone”
  - Styles of singing
  - Hot times in la cité
  - Leaves in a hurry, informally
  - It flows where the wind blows
  - One of 11 for Big Ben
  - Like an important decision
  - Reason one might get extended time on the PSAT
  - Tried to hit
  - “\_\_\_ is it?”
  - Nova preceder
  - Like some horse feed
  - “\_\_\_ and the Thirteenth Confession” (Laura Nyro album)
  - Subject of a ganfeld experiment, in brief

Online subscriptions: Today’s puzzle and more than 9,000 past puzzles, [nytimes.com/crosswords](http://nytimes.com/crosswords)

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# Weekend



ALICE S. HALL/NBCU, VIA GETTY IMAGES

## ON COMEDY

BY JASON ZINOMAN

One of the greatest magic tricks I ever saw unfolded when Johnny Carson invited the illusionist Uri Geller on “The Tonight Show” to bend a spoon with his mind.

This now notorious 1973 episode is best known for Geller’s failures. It has emerged over the years that staff members from “The Tonight Show” consulted with a magician, James Randi, who advised them on how to prepare the props to stymie him. It worked. For 20 excruciating minutes, Geller failed to astound.

The real trick here was not performed by Geller, but by Carson, who deftly played the role of generous host, making something that could easily have seemed cruel come off as kind. He confesses humbly to being a little skeptical, makes a big show of wanting Geller to do well, invites him to return and try again, and as Geller struggles, Carson listens, waits patiently, acts baffled. An amateur magician himself, Carson possessed a quick and cutting wit, but in keeping it restrained, he clarified his greatest gift.

Johnny Carson was a genius in the art of being liked, which is remarkable, considering he wasn’t, on paper, especially likable: a largely absent father, philandering husband, a sometimes mean drunk, a fiercely private figure even to many close to him. He was a talk-show host who didn’t always seem to enjoy talking to people.

At the pinnacle of his fame in the late 1970s, Carson said that his best friend was possibly his lawyer, Henry Bushkin, who would later write that he was shocked by this admission, adding that he had never “met a man with less of an aptitude or interest in maintaining real relationships.”

Except the one with the vast American public. In our fragmented media landscape, it can be difficult to grasp just how large Carson loomed over the culture. At the center of late-night for 30 years — he presided from 1962 to 1992 — he is the most influential talk-show host of all time, and possibly the most popular figure in the history of television. Yet for someone so famous, it seemed as if we never really got to know him.

In the popular imagination, Carson has become the perfect avatar for a monoculture that no longer exists: calm and inoffensive, rigorously conventional and apolitical, the kind of soothing showbiz personality that

# Still relevant and ever opaque

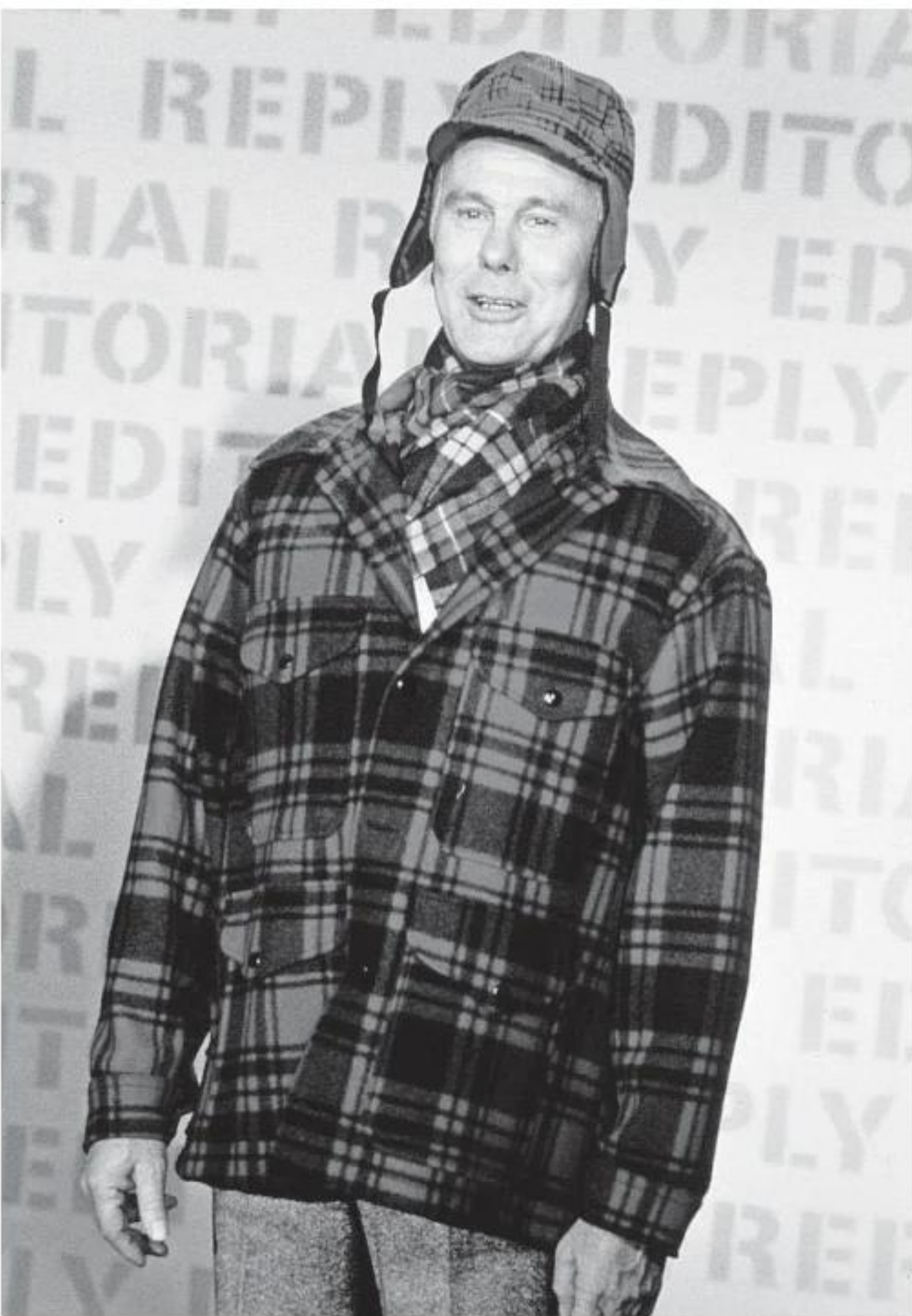
The late-night host Johnny Carson looms large to this day. But there was a darkness at the heart of his appeal.

helps everyone go to sleep. He reflected America with his polite fake neutrality. But there’s always been more of a subtext and strategy to his performance, a crowd-pleasing fantasy beneath the facade that speaks to deeper and darker strains in the American psyche.

**IT’S BEEN THREE DECADES** since he retired, which means he’s been off the air longer than he was on. But he remains relevant this year. In the middle of denouncing late-night hosts at a rally, Donald J. Trump praised Carson’s greatness, begging him to return. Carson is a figure of power and intimidation in the new movie “Saturday

Night,” which portrays him as concerned that “S.N.L.” might compete with his show for bookings. And the latest season of “Feud” featured Molly Ringwald as his second wife, Joanne, a good friend of Truman Capote, who once wrote a Carson-like character described as a rageful sadist behind “that huckleberry grin.”

Many have tried to explain Carson’s success. He was an even-keeled former game show host from the Midwest who specialized in light banter and easygoing punchlines. Standing with military posture, he never appeared to be working that hard and the biggest laughs in his monologue were often in the silent pauses after a joke bombed. How could



CHERYL BALTER/NBCU PHOTO BANK, VIA GETTY IMAGES

**Top, Johnny Carson in 1992 on his final “Tonight Show.” He made stars out of people like David Letterman, left, his protégé. Some of his comedy characters, like Floyd R. Turbo, above, didn’t age well.**

someone so robotic and bland become a late-night giant?

Now the first major reported biography since his death has arrived to try to answer that question. Its author, Bill Zehme, is a heavyweight profiler, a wonderful stylist who has written some of the best journalism about the psychology of the peculiar characters who populate late-night television. With his profile of David Letterman, for instance, he did a better job of digging into that Carson protégé’s relationship with his father than any-

one else. But the original host proves to be a more challenging subject.

“Carson the Magnificent” is a fascinating if frustrating read. It often seems at war with itself, perhaps because Zehme died before finishing it. His research assistant, Mike Thomas, who completed it, tells us in the introduction that Zehme set out to write a “celebratory biography,” and I believe him. But it doesn’t read that way. When Carson gave him his blessing for the book and said he didn’t care if people took shots at him, Zehme wonders who would do that. If we are to believe this, the author had his innocence shaken.

His argument for Carson’s greatness rests considerably on what he didn’t do, the jokes he didn’t make, the restraint. In one of his better zingers, Zehme writes that Carson “understood withholding better than a tax accountant.” He keeps returning to the words of a Carson producer, Art Stark, who said he was “great by omission.”

This is an essential point. Carson understood better than anyone what he did well and made sure to do nothing more. Unlike several of his peers, he avoided acting. The many parts he turned down included the Jerry Lewis character in “The King of Comedy” and the Gene Wilder one in “Blazing Saddles.” He rarely did interviews and remained scrupulously tight-lipped about his personal life. Carson didn’t leave the four corners of the television set.

But staying out of the picture isn’t enough to explain his singular appeal and dominance. When he took over “The Tonight Show” from Jack Paar in 1962, replacing that legendary star was considered a suicide mission. Within half a year, Carson had eclipsed him in the ratings. When he staged a wedding with the eccentric musician Tiny Tim, hardly a major draw, 45 million people watched the show, making it the highest-rated broadcast of the decade after the moon landing. In the 1970s, Carson’s audience ballooned, averaging 17 million a night in 1978 and bringing in an unprecedented \$40 million to \$50 million annually.

But numbers alone don’t begin to measure his singular influence. He was the most powerful gatekeeper in comedy, single-handedly making stars of Letterman and Steven Wright, among others. When he moved the show to Los Angeles from New York in 1972, it’s not an exaggeration to say the balance of cultural power shifted from one coast to another.

Carson wielded his power conservatively, careful to reflect the culture **CARSON, PAGE 20**



WENDY PERL/NBCU PHOTO BANK, VIA GETTY IMAGES



# Casting the Trump cabinet

CRITIC'S NOTEBOOK

His choices look familiar, images of the world he has promised to (re)create

BY VANESSA FRIEDMAN

People who are casually following the recent announcements from President-elect Donald J. Trump about how he intends to staff the upper ranks of the executive branch could be forgiven for thinking they were reading about a beauty contest, not political appointments. If, during his first administration, Mr. Trump boasted of his generals from “central casting,” now, it seems, he has applied the same principle to the whole shebang.

Tom Homan, his pick for “border czar,” is from “central casting,” he announced in a campaign speech.

Kristi Noem, the choice for homeland security, is “beautiful,” he crowed during a rally.

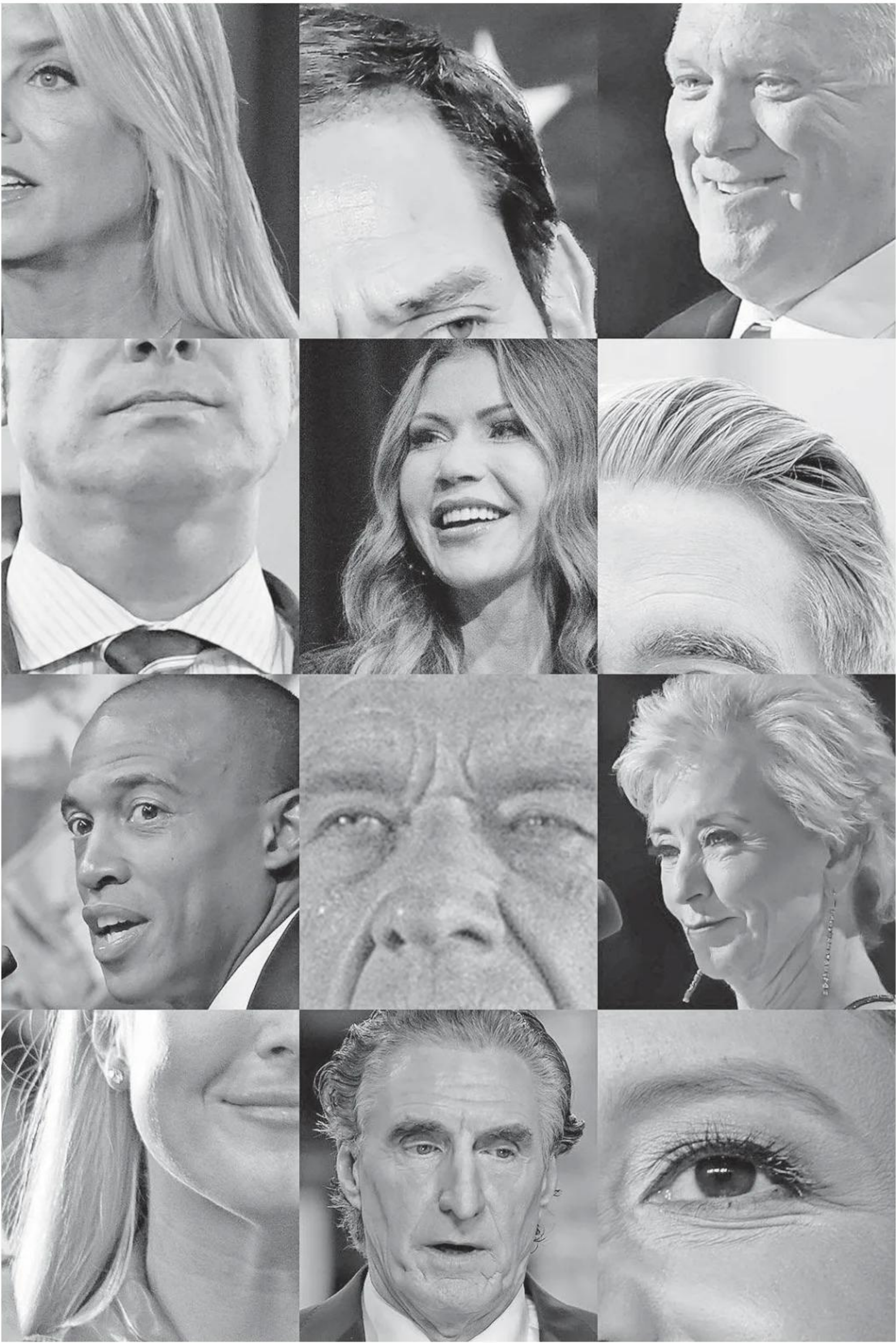
Matt Gaetz, the highly controversial choice for attorney general who later withdrew his name from consideration, and his wife, Ginger, are “a seriously good-looking couple,” Mr. Trump said.

While it is easy to dismiss this focus as superficial distraction, to mock Mr. Trump’s reported penchant for watching videos of potential senior staff members to see how they look and perform onscreen and to condemn it as the latest expression of the reality TV-ification of government, underestimating the idea would be a mistake. Not just because of the controversies over some of the names or their very public loyalty to Mr. Trump, but because of what they embody about his worldview.

They’ve got a look. “It’s an aesthetic strategy,” said Samantha N. Sheppard, an associate professor in the department of performing and media arts at Cornell University in New York State. “Casting is cultural production. It’s a way we build ideas about race, gender, credibility.” It is a technique for populating a specific picture of the world.

Mr. Trump has always understood this. It is one of the lessons of his own life, in which playing a businessman on TV, manifesting the part of the ultimate executive, was a recipe for success.

“Part of his superpower is his ability to tap into the popular idea of what a good leader looks like,” said Tara Setmayer, a founder of the Seneca Project, a bipartisan super PAC dedicated to supporting politically moderate women. If it worked for him, why shouldn’t he apply the same approach to his senior staff members? Especially the ones who are public-facing, “face” being the operative word. The people



whose pictures will represent the actions of the administration in reports and speeches and social media posts. Many are already recognizable from TV (at least among a certain part of Mr. Trump’s base), with all the associations of proficiency and responsibility that being a host, or an expert talking head, evoke.

“They are comforting,” Ms. Sheppard said, “because they are familiar.” Not just familiar from Fox News, the former home of several of the picks but familiar because they represent a return to traditional archetypes of

power, business and gender as mediated through a Hollywood lens in the latter part of the 20th century. You know, that mythic time when Michael Douglas played Gordon Gekko and “The American President,” Mr. Trump’s career took off, and power looked mostly white and mostly male. He has built a supporting cast not just in his own image, but in the image of the world he promised to (re)create during his campaign.

His choices all have “perfect jawlines,” David Remnick wrote in The New Yorker, the kind that, in the case

of the men, could be described as clenched with purpose or jutting forward like a dare. They have adopted both the Trump uniform — navy suit, white shirt, red tie — and the Trump look. Most of the men have full heads of hair, like a biblical symbol of their power: Marco Rubio, the pick for State, combs his neatly to the side like a choirboy; Doug Burgum, the choice for Interior, brushes his back from his forehead, as if it is blown by a wilderness breeze; Scott Bessent, for Treasury, styles his in a carefully controlled master of the universe swoop.

“Part of his superpower is his ability to tap into the popular idea of what a good leader looks like.”

There are exceptions. For example, Scott Turner, Mr. Trump’s choice for the Department of Housing and Urban Development, has a shaved pate, though his manliness is not in doubt, given that he is a former N.F.L. player. “Manliness” itself is part of the sell, as it is with Pete Hegseth, the pick for secretary of defense, who is known for his brush cut and his tattoos, and Robert F. Kennedy Jr., chosen to head Health and Human Services, who did shirtless push-ups in public during his campaign. (Mr. Trump, of course, spent time on the campaign trail praising his own “beautiful body.”) The Kennedy squint is almost a perfect twin to the Trump squint.

By contrast, the women, with their cascading hair and camera-ready makeup, offer a Miss Universe-Breck Girl version of gender that offsets the power of the positions they might be about to assume. Pam Bondi, whom Mr. Trump picked for attorney general after Mr. Gaetz’s withdrawal, has the glossy blond locks of Ivanka Trump and her sister-in-law, Lara. So does Karoline Leavitt, Mr. Trump’s choice for press secretary.

Ms. Noem, the pick for homeland security secretary, famously remade herself in the mode of Melania, with wavy brown tresses and generous eyelashes, a look also adopted by Elise Stefanik, the United Nations ambassador in waiting — as well as, on occasion, Lori Chavez-DeRemer, who was tapped for labor secretary.

Indeed, the only two women on the senior staff with short hair are Linda McMahon, the pick for the Department of Education, whose history as a founder of World Wrestling Entertainment is its own sort of toughness credential (and gives her a sort of bossy school principal air), and Susie Wiles, who, as chief of staff, will play her part primarily behind the scenes.

The effect is to create a “narrative about the performance of masculinity, the performance of femininity,” said Ruth Ben-Ghiat, a history professor at New York University and the author of “Strongmen: Mussolini to the Present.” “It’s a very important tool in marketing Trump’s ideas.”

It is a clichéd response to the fears around trans rights stoked by the Trump “they/them” campaign ad that offers a return to gender stereotypes past — and a sort of Hallmark cover for actions expected to come.

In that sense, Ms. Sheppard said, Mr. Trump has simply gone from “playing a version of himself as a star to being the star, the executive producer and the show runner of the country.”

If, after all, the goal is to radically remake the institutions of government, who better to sell that proposal than a group of officials who look as if they were formed in the celluloid image of the institutions? The ones who may not have the qualifications but effectively play the roles of experts on TV?

That may not make a difference for the senators who likely will have to confirm Mr. Trump’s choices. But for most of the public, scrolling through the news on their phones as they look for Black Friday deals and the latest memes, those images, typecast as they are, come with an implied authority.

In this sense, Ms. Setmayer said, “perception is reality.” And when it comes to perception, appearance matters.

“It’s one way you airbrush history,” Ms. Ben-Ghiat said.

# The open portal to endless shopping

The ‘haul’ is a phenomenon of our times, and now it has its own Amazon store

BY VANESSA FRIEDMAN

In mid-November, as election post-mortems focused on inflation worries and the holiday shopping season began to pick up steam, Amazon introduced a new storefront.

Known as Amazon Haul, and currently available only on the app and in the United States, it promises “a place to discover even more affordable fashion, home, lifestyle, electronics and other products with ultralow prices.” Everything on the site costs \$20 or less. One long-sleeved emerald-green stretch velvet minidress is \$12.99; opaque purple tights are \$3.99; and a cherry-red elastic belt is \$1.99.

The offerings all come from third-party sellers and take two weeks or so for delivery, which is presumably the source of some of the price cuts. The more you buy, the cheaper the total, according to the site: “5% off orders \$50 and over, and 10% off orders \$75 or more.” And for a limited time, customers get an extra 50 percent off at checkout.

But is this really about savings? Or is it about something more complicated and potentially insidious? Maria Boschetti, a spokeswoman for Amazon, said that the company was simply responding to customers’ behavior, giving them more of what they wanted. That is probably true.

But it seems that what Amazon thinks customers want is not just more money in the bank. It is the ability to acquire more and more stuff.

At least judging by the name of the new store.

Amazon declined to comment on the inspiration behind the use of “Haul,” but presumably that is the whole point of the concept — at least as a defining principle of 21st-century shopping. By naming its new store after the practice, Amazon is simply offering what Ken Pucker, an adjunct professor at the Tuck School of Business at Dartmouth College in New Hampshire, called “truth in advertising.”

Perhaps it is time to actually face what that means.

The term “haul” became popular on YouTube in the early 2000s as a reference to fashion and beauty buying sprees and entered the Urban Dictionary in 2009. Vloggers would share their purchases with their followers, tapping into the growing sense of shopping as vicarious thrill and emotional sustenance.

Facilitated by the dual rise of fast fashion, with its emphasis on novelty for all and the explosion of social media and influencer culture, hauls became a form of performance art and shared practice, a cultural phenomenon. They got a lift in 2022 from the instant fashion digital marketplace in the form of Shein, which adds up to a reported 10,000 garments a day to its site, and Temu.

At this point, there are 17 million posts under the hashtag #haul on TikTok alone, according to the platform’s analytics, with 16,000 added in the last seven days — and an additional one million videos on YouTube and 3.7 million posts on Instagram. There are subhashtags such as #sheinhaul and #targethaul, and this fall, back to school began “flooding” social media, according to Vogue. You can spend hours staring avidly at strangers surrounded by veritable mountains of new things.

“It became almost a human right to participate in consumer culture,” said Lucie Greene, the founder of the trend forecasting firm Light Years. “We’ve gotten to the point where you feel left out



“We’ve gotten to the point where you feel left out of society if you are not part of the shopping cycle.”

of society if you are not part of the shopping cycle.” And the shopping cycle, which used to have ebbs and flows, is now less a cycle than a constant stream, a fire hose of product.

“The hyper-consumption that triggers, just because of the newness and the price point, creates this instant need for the next thing,” Mr. Pucker said. “And if you can satisfy that at a price point that’s half what it was, you can buy twice as many.”

To be sure, there is nothing wrong with shopping, nothing wrong with the concept of treats and extras. There is a human desire for beauty and its delight and self-expression. People should have access to that pleasure, at whatever price point they can manage. There is something comforting and reassuring about abundance, especially at a time when there seems to be a free-floating sense of malaise in the air.

But that is not what hauls are about.

Hauls are the shopping equivalent of a dopamine-chasing overdose. That is the essence of the idea, which is less about any one thing than about the sheer number of things. It is the elevation of quantity over quality, muchness as an end in itself. Like social media itself, and smartphones, the haul creates its own subset of compulsive behavior.

“It accelerates the consumption addiction,” Ms. Greene said. That addiction is not officially a part of the DSM-5, the most recent version of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, but it is recognized by the Cleveland Clinic and the journal World Psychiatry, among other official bodies.

By embracing hauls, we are training ourselves, in a Pavlovian way, to chase the thrill of delivery, the joy of unboxing. By sharing endless haul videos, we are seducing other people into sharing our compulsion for more and more and more, because the more people who buy

into any one idea, the less bad we feel about our own behavior.

But focusing on the stuff — on the pleasure of piles, the allure of excess — makes each thing become less important, which means it is even more disposable. When the excitement of getting all that stuff wears off, the stuff itself does not really matter. It just takes up space. And that means it is easy to throw away.

There is a tendency to be preachy about the sustainability of all this. And there is no question it is an issue: in terms of the human labor that almost always bears the brunt of low-cost production, the chemicals and waste and carbon emissions involved, and the piles of disposable stuff that end up in landfills.

“It’s the privatization of profit and the socialization of cost,” Mr. Pucker said.

That is the subject of many films, including “The True Cost,” “Textile Mountain” and Netflix’s recent “Buy Now! The Shopping Conspiracy,” which opens with the confessions of a former employee of (what else) Amazon and also includes testimony from former Adidas, Apple and L’Oréal executives about techniques used to lure shoppers into buying more stuff.

Not surprisingly, an anti-haul movement has grown in response, at least in a limited way. The hashtag #antihaul has almost 3,000 posts on TikTok; #deinfluence, about 4,500. There are even #thrifthaunts, which is somewhat confusing, since they celebrate getting a lot of new old stuff, which may be better than a lot of new new stuff but still puts the emphasis on “a lot.”

Treats are treats precisely because they are not available all the time. Shopping sprees used to be exciting because they were rare. Black Friday had meaning because it happened once a year. Haul may be a good name for a store — it may even be the store we not just want, but deserve. But it is also a “Black Mirror” episode waiting to happen.



WEEKEND

BOOKS

# Palestinian poets write war’s rawest portraits

Two new collections gather unvarnished views of loss, violence and displacement

BY ELISABETH EGAN

Mosab Abu Toha held his hands six inches apart to demonstrate the flattening of his home in Gaza on Oct. 28, 2023.

“I have a video of my mother with my brother, digging through the rubble in the hope of finding some food,” he said. “The only thing they could find were books.”

Two branches of the Edward Said Public Library, which Abu Toha founded, were also destroyed in airstrikes, he said. The collection consisted of around 6,000 titles in English. Each box took eight weeks to arrive, having traveled through Israel for processing.

“People used to come borrow books,” said Abu Toha, who fled Gaza in 2023 after Hamas’s attack on Israel on Oct. 7, 2023 sparked an ongoing retaliatory blitz. “I used to give lessons in the library. There was a book club.”

Now in Syracuse, N.Y., Abu Toha follows the war from afar. “I personally lost about 31 members of my extended family,” he said. He continued, “The rubble of my house, the rubble of the school where I used to teach, is on my shoulder.”

When that weight becomes too heavy, Abu Toha pours it into a poem.

Several of those poems have become “Forest of Noise,” his most recent collection, published last month. Along with “No One Will Know You Tomorrow,” by another Palestinian poet, Najwan Darwish, which came out on Nov. 26, it provides readers with an unvarnished view of war and its repercussions: fear, dread, devastation and exile.

In “Thanks (on the Eve of My Twenty-Second Birthday),” Abu Toha describes a family fleeing their home during an airstrike: “Mother forgot the cake in the oven, the bomb smoke mixed with the burnt chocolate and strawberry.”

In “The Last Kiss,” he shows a soldier leaving for battle — the sandwich in his backpack, the smudge of his



MARISA LESHNOV/GUARDIAN, VIA REDUX



KARSTEN MORAN FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES



VÉRONIQUE VERCHEVAL

Clockwise from above, Lena Khalaf Tuffaha; Mosab Abu Toha; and Najwan Darwish. Abu Toha, who fled Gaza in 2023, and Darwish both have new poetry collections out.

wife’s lipstick on his ear, the list of baby names they brainstormed together.

“For me, the story of the loss is important,” Abu Toha said. “But equally important is what was happening before everything was lost.”

The signposts of normal life are there, obscured by ash.

Since its publication, the book has sold 32,500 copies — a significant number, especially for a poetry col-

lection. Abu Toha believes his poems paint a clearer picture than a news story because they include feelings — and, he said, “because I am not a camera.”

His work has visceral immediacy.

He’ll jot down a poem, post it to Instagram or X and transmit the horror of an airstrike to tens of thousands of followers almost in real time. “I can publish it sooner than I can publish a novel or a short story,” Abu Toha said.

“It doesn’t wait. The urgency of the moment is written.”

Abu Toha and Darwish join a long tradition of poetry about war. Since Russia invaded Ukraine in 2022, Ukrainian poets have fueled a literary revival. A new documentary, “After: Poetry Destroys Silence,” shows writers’ responses to the Holocaust and argues for the importance of the form in addressing trauma.

One proponent of this approach is Edward Hirsch, author of (among others) “100 Poems to Break Your Heart” and “Gabriel,” a 78-page elegy to his son, who died at 22.

“Poetry gives you information that

you can’t find elsewhere,” he said. “It speaks to our emotional lives. It dramatizes the experience from the inside.”

Two Palestinian-American writers, Fady Joudah and Lena Khalaf Tuffaha, were finalists for the U.S. National Book Award for poetry; on Nov. 20, Tuffaha won the award.

In her acceptance speech, she described how her father, who was born in Jerusalem in 1938, sat her down when she was 5 years old and told her “the story of the homeland he couldn’t live in anymore.” She said, “That story has carried me through my entire life — has driven me, has motivated me.”

In Tuffaha’s and Joudah’s work, and in collections by Abu Toha and Darwish, Hirsch said, “there’s an element of witness. There’s an element of resistance. There’s a passionate longing. And there’s a fury.”

He continued: “Tremendous grief, in my experience, renders you mute. By trying to find your way from muteness to language, you bring yourself back into the human community.”

Darwish, like Abu Toha, writes every day, even when it takes a toll. “Sometimes I’m exhausted. I have nothing. I write one line and that’s it,” he said.

Abu Toha used to write in Arabic. Since the Oct. 7 attacks, he said, “I haven’t written a single word in Arabic.” His thinks of his audience as “the outside world.”

Darwish, 45, lives in Jerusalem and writes in Arabic; the poems in “No One Will Know You Tomorrow,” published by Yale University Press, are translated into English by Kareem James Abu-Zeid. They cover a decade of Darwish’s work — from 2014 to 2024 — and, like Abu Toha’s, they grapple with a sense of erasure.

“I have no country to return to and no country to be banished from,” Darwish writes in “We Never Stop.”

In “Hardly Breathe,” he writes, “Didn’t I have a history?” And, “How did you take my share of loss and leave abandonment in its stead, a planet without a ribcage?”

In the introduction to “No One Will Know You Tomorrow,” Darwish’s third collection in English, Abu-Zeid describes the book as “a relentless bearing witness.”

Darwish also has a day job as culture editor at The New Arab newspaper — a role he appreciates, he said, because the word for “editor” also means “liberator” in Arabic.

“When I was a kid my dream was to liberate Palestine,” Darwish said. Now, he said, he’s liberating the words of fellow authors: “The irony of how dreams can become smaller with time.”

Poetry is a “spiritual practice” for Darwish, one he turns to in order to make sense of his own life. He carries a notebook wherever he goes, and keeps it within arm’s reach as he sleeps. Recently he started taking pictures of his notebooks in case something happens to one of them.

“What kind of creatures would we become without poetry?” Darwish said. “It’s the oldest art we practice.”

## By the Book

Billy Collins

Poems about dead family members irk the former U.S. poet laureate: “If I come across ‘Dad’ or ‘Mommy,’ I’m out. ‘Grandma’ gets a pass.” His new collection is “Water, Water.”



REBECCA CLARKE

Have you ever gotten into trouble for reading a book?

I got into trouble several times at my all-male Jesuit college for engaging in the nefarious act of reading after lights out. In a dorm room whose window and door had been light-proofed with newspapers and tin foil, I would climb up into a luggage closet and shut the little door behind me. With a pillow for comfort and a flashlight taped to a heating pipe, the scene was made for reading. After closing Camus’s “The Stranger,” I descended a changed young man.

What books are currently on your night stand?

Maevy Brennan, “The Long-Winded Lady,” a collection of her Talk of the Town pieces; James Wood, “How Fiction Works”; “The Letters of Seamus Heaney”; Richard Panek’s “The Trouble With Gravity”; “Pillars of Creation”; John Avlon, “Lincoln and the Fight for Peace”; Lily Brooks-Dalton, “The Light Pirate”; Rowan Ricardo Phillips, “Living Weapon”; and, as always, Emerson: “Essays and Lectures.”

What books would people be surprised to find on your shelves?

Andrew Beyer’s “The Winning Horseplayer” and Thomas Eakins’s “A Drawing Manual.”

What books are you embarrassed not to have read yet?

Life has become too short for “Middlemarch,” “A Dance to the Music of Time,” “The Alexandria Quartet” and lots of others I’m too ashamed even to mention.

What’s the last book you recommended to a member of your family?

Niall Williams’s “This Is Happiness” may sound like self-help, but it’s a

beautifully humorous novel-memoir about life in an imagined village in the west of Ireland. The language is a joyride; even Williams’s sentence structures can be amusing.

How has the internet changed your writing?

The internet asks us to speed up. Poetry invites us to slow down. I write with pencil and paper, then use the computer only as a fancy typewriter. So no change really, except in its role as the most persistent distraction in human history.

How do you know when a poem is finished?

A poem is finished when I discover its ending, where I don’t want to say any more and you don’t want to hear any more. A sad truth is the real ending of any poem occurs where the reader stops reading it. I always try not to let that happen.

“Longing” and “invoking the heart” have fallen out of fashion in poetry, you write. Do you miss them?

After the Romantic Movement, yearning and longing retreated from their high-water mark of popularity. They went the way of the exclamation point. And exclamation itself. These days, instead of envying the skylark or the nightingale because it can fly and sing, the poet can just leap from the title, take wing and break into song. And instead of crying out to the heart (“Oh heart!” or “Yo, heart!”), poets are mostly talking to themselves.

In a 2014 interview you said you’d

stopped reading poems. Is that still true?

Did I really say that? I must have been having a moment. I read poems every day, but I often don’t finish them for reasons it would require a workshop to explain. We all have our deal-breakers. John Ciardi, then poetry editor of The Saturday Review, balked at any name from classical mythology. I find that family members can burden a poem, especially if they happen to be dead. So if I come across “Dad” or “Mommy,” I’m out. “Grandma” gets a pass.

What’s the most interesting thing you learned from a book recently?

From a book on primates, I recently learned that chimps, monkeys and gorillas all peel bananas from the opposite end from us and use the stem as a handle. I even wrote a poem about how I made the switch.

How do you sign books for your fans?

Quickly, with a smile, because I never know what to write. Paul Durcan is the only poet whose line I’ve stood in to get a signature. He paused for a moment, then wrote, “O, the many nights she pierced my heart.” That’s well beyond my reach.

What subjects do you wish more authors wrote about?

I have never recommended a subject to a fiction writer. I prefer novels where very little happens, except everything seems to be getting worse. José Saramago’s “Blindness,” for example. Emma Donoghue’s “Room.” Or almost anything by Thomas Bernhard.

You’re organizing a literary dinner party. Which three writers, dead or alive, do you invite?

Meeting an author whom you admire is one of life’s most reliably disappointing experiences, starting with what they are wearing. But I would like to test that truism by inviting Nabokov, Flannery O’Connor and Melville. Plus Ann Patchett, who, while I’m busy cooking, would explain the 21st century to the others.

## THE SUNDAY CROSSWORD

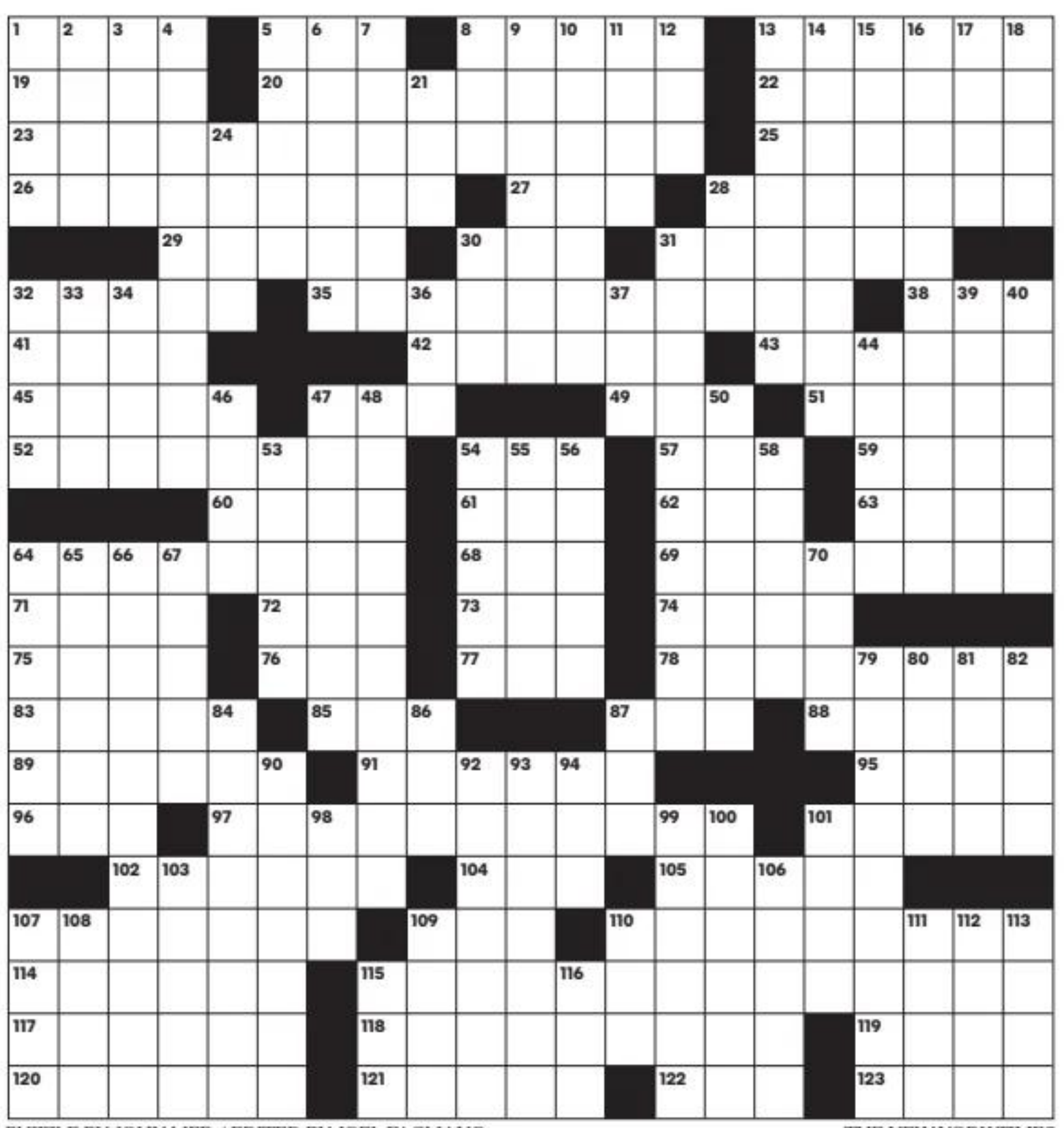
Drive Around the Block

Edited by Joel Fagliano

- Across**
- 1 Snack  
5 Source of distress for a bull  
8 George Eliot’s “Mamer”  
13 Actress Barton of “The O.C.”  
19 Home of Oberlin College  
20 Economist who wrote about an “invisible hand”  
22 Clear, in a way  
23 “Blemish on a vehicle”  
25 Untroubled  
26 Small talks  
27 “\_\_\_\_, me?”  
29 Norman Vincent \_\_\_\_\_, “The Power of Positive Thinking” author  
30 Joker  
31 Defeated  
32 “With 101-Across, extra level of intricacy”  
35 “Like a weakly hit ground ball”  
38 Lotion letters  
41 Clamorous  
42 Youth sports level  
43 Understand, so to speak  
45 “The Corsican Brothers” author, 1844  
47 Alier of annual “A Christmas Story” marathons
- 49 \_\_\_\_\_ Plains, Ill.  
51 Manage  
52 Americana symbol  
54 Decorate at a bakery  
57 Grumpy friend  
59 Flashes  
60 Once, old-style  
61 Clinch  
62 East Lansing sch.  
63 “Now!”  
64 Info provider at a crossroads  
68 Off, in mob slang  
69 Bests in a staring contest, say  
71 Not doing much  
72 Accept, as an excuse  
73 Rapper \_\_\_\_\_ Spice  
74 \_\_\_\_\_ National-galerie, modern art museum in Berlin  
75 Diving bird  
76 Always, in verse  
77 Diamonds, informally  
78 Power line?  
83 Actor Elgort of “West Side Story”  
85 Ride the pine  
87 Address a gray area?  
88 Either of two wisecracking film critics in “Mystery Science Theater 3000”  
89 Dirty-y words?
- 91 Co-star of 1952’s “Moulin Rouge,” familiarly  
95 Big name in travel mugs  
96 Summer on the Seine  
97 “Holding that’s hard to convert to cash”  
101 “See 32-Across”  
102 Purveyor of life-guard gear  
104 X exchanges, for short  
105 metabolism  
107 Settled down for the night  
109 Seer’s sphere  
110 Midwestern city where Pete Buttigieg was mayor  
114 Uselessly  
115 “1984 Sade hit”  
117 “You pickin’ up what I’m puttin’ down?”  
118 Business-person bringing in beaucoup bucks  
119 It goes with the flow  
120 Worked the land  
121 Like Sanskrit  
122 Digits rarely given out in a bar: Abbr.
- 123 Exam on which Elle Woods got a 179 in “Legally Blonde”

Solution to puzzle of November 23-24

REFS	FIN	MALL	OPER
UVEA	IRAN	JOLIE	BRAVA
BEEF	ADOBO	ORANG	AGLET
LEMONS	C	BASKET	BALLS
DAISY	HISS	NAAN	
INN	TIER	DAS	CDDRIVE
EGG	AMNESIC	IRA	ZAPF
HEN	NOTALOT	BARKEE	PEPER
ALLUM	IDOL	OMIGYES	TEO
ROMAN	RETELLS	RIDE	
DUBLINER	CID	BARGE	SIN
ETA	STEADED	NECCO	
ALA	ENSUES	SUSS	DIET
SUBTRACTS	FTMEADE	SHE	
KNEE	HEH	LIBELER	SOL
ADMIRE	JAM	NETIN	OLE
PIRAM	EVER	EGRET	
SEAL	FAPPRO	COMES	ACRE
TEXAN	TUDOR	CHEST	BUMP
UNITY	IMAMS	AHAS	OTTO
NYSE	CASE	RINO	RSVP



PUZZLE BY JOHN LIEB / EDITED BY JOEL FAGLIANO

- Down**
- 1 Bartlett cousin  
2 “Not gonna fly”  
3 Voice heard by millions worldwide  
4 Play down  
5 Russian country house  
6 Things to strive for  
7 Lilac or lavender  
8 One of 15 boycotting the 1984 Summer Olympics: Abbr.  
9 “That’s already crossed my desk”  
10 John of “Footloose”  
11 Record label for Buffalo Springfield  
12 “Put a sock in it!”  
13 Inspiration for the Camaro and Firebird  
14 Xenon, e.g.  
15 Rocky debris  
16 “Expectation at the start of a hotel stay”  
17 [Stop looking at your phone! Go!]  
18 Matures  
21 Hosts  
24 What a par 5 has never been, on the P.G.A. Tour  
28 Tre + tre  
30 Org. for John Cena and Roman Reigns  
31 Operate at a heavy loss  
32 Emmy winner born Alfonso D’Abruzzo  
33 Arrange, as hair  
34 Jettison  
36 Special  
37 Took control  
39 Mr. Bigglesworth, to Dr. Evil  
40 Winter morning phenomena  
44 Thompson of “The Marvels”  
46 Trickle  
47 Cold comfort?  
48 Leader of the Pink Ladies in “Grease”  
50 “I was wrong ... big deal!”  
53 Government investigation  
54 Positive votes  
55 “\_\_\_\_\_ the day!”  
56 Comfort  
58 One leaving you in stitches  
64 Livestock feed  
65 “Your accusation is unfounded!”  
66 “Quickly moves past in conversation”  
67 Tots, in Tijuana  
70 Villainous look  
79 “Cinderella” setting  
80 Toe the line  
81 Form of memorization  
82 Brothago  
84 0 to 100, maybe  
86 Mao \_\_\_\_\_tung  
87 Courtroom figs.  
90 Straightened, as feathers  
92 Alternative to iOS  
93 Machine waiting to enter the middle of this grid, as suggested by the answers to the starred clues  
94 Bad sound to hear while biking  
96 incongruous  
99 Volume options on an iPad?  
100 Gray-brown shades  
101 Cowardly Lion portrayal  
103 Song of David  
106 Unbending  
107 Musical phrase  
108 Fit for service  
109 Mideast sultanate  
110 \_\_\_\_\_ Na Na  
111 Guesses of interest in the cellphone lot  
112 Brilliant observation?  
113 “Phoeey!”  
115 Eastern honorific  
116 Cable choice for film fans





The Royal Shakespeare Company rehearsing at Chicago Shakespeare Theater in October.

PHOTOGRAPHS BY LYNDON FRENCH FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

# Stratford-upon-Avon comes to Chicago

CHICAGO

It's been some time since all the world has been the R.S.C.'s stage

BY MICHAEL PAULSON

The Royal Shakespeare Company, which keeps the plays of William Shakespeare alive in the town of his birth, was long a regular presence in the United States. It brought Ian McKellen to Brooklyn as King Lear, built a replica of its main theater in an Upper East Side drill hall and sent a stream of shows to Broadway.

But in recent years the renowned troupe has taken fewer overseas trips from its home in Stratford-upon-Avon, England.

Now, for the first time since the coronavirus pandemic, the company has returned to the United States — but not to New York, where some of the main importers of European work remain diminished and disoriented. It has struck up a partnership with Chicago Shakespeare Theater, which is led by Edward Hall, whose ties to the Royal Shakespeare Company run unusually deep: His father, Peter Hall, the eminent British director, founded it.

“My love of Shakespeare grew up from my father talking to me about Shakespeare, and why he was passionate about Shakespeare, and why he thought Shakespeare endured, and quoting Shakespeare,” he said. “I watched him work a bit, and then, like every child, you go off into a corner and find your own way, which is what I did.”

His earliest memory of Shakespeare is watching “The Wars of the Roses,” directed by his father, when he was 4 or 5, and “seeing a lot of people in armor with very exciting-looking weapons.”

Hall, who is now an accomplished stage and screen director with plenty of Shakespeare productions under his belt, said that when he got the Chicago job, one of his first emails was to Tamara Harvey and Daniel Evans, the new artistic directors of the R.S.C., asking what it would take for them to work together.

His timing was good: Harvey and Evans, trying to put their own stamp on the venerable R.S.C., were eager to find wider audiences for their work.

“For us, it was a no-brainer, because it feels like that relationship with North America is really important,” Evans said. He noted that American philanthropy has played a significant role in the R.S.C.’s life, but, even more, he said, “it was strategically important for us to collaborate internationally — crossing borders, making connections.”

The first result of the new relationship is a lyrical staging of “Pericles,” one of Shakespeare’s later and lesser-known works, which is about a prince on the run and the wife and daughter he loses and finds along the way. When it ran in



Stratford-upon-Avon over the summer, The Guardian gave it four stars. Now playing on Chicago’s Navy Pier, overlooking Lake Michigan, The Chicago Tribune called it “a gorgeous, not-to-be-missed production.”

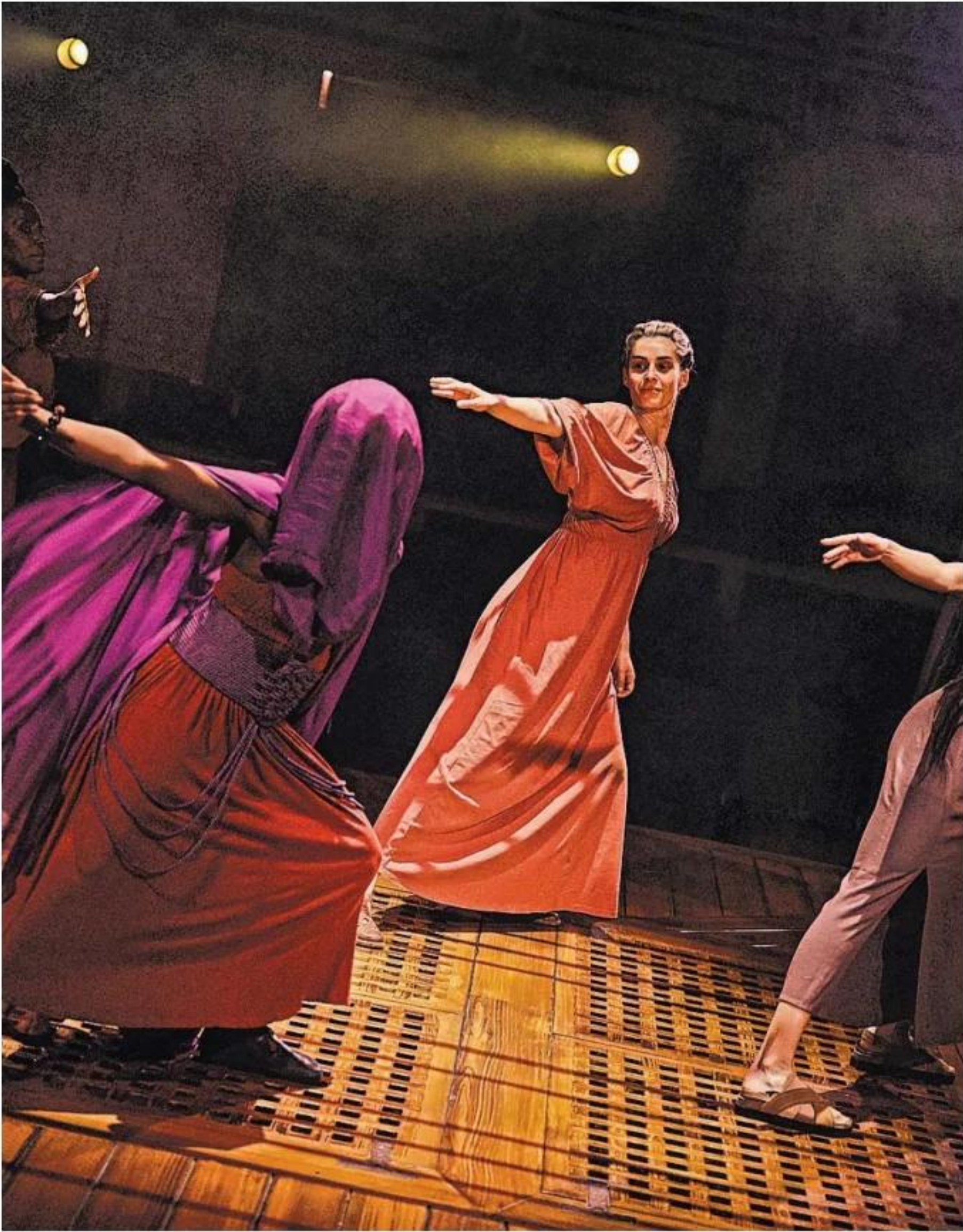
There are notable differences in the audience reactions in the two countries. The audience at Chicago Shakes, as the American company is often called, was more responsive, laughing at some of the play’s zanier plot twists (pirates!), with sporadic outbursts of approval (for romance) and disapproval (for incest). “The thing that’s been fascinating in terms of the audiences is how much more vocal they are,” Harvey, who directed both productions, said of the Chicago run, “and also how deeply they felt the need for a story that ends in reunion and hope and understanding.”

Chicago Shakes, a nonprofit, raised money from donors to defray the costs of the production, which included bringing the British cast members to the United States and housing them for the duration of the run, as well building a set that is a replica of the one in England. About 16,000 people are expected to see the show during its Chicago run, said Kimberly Motes, the company’s executive director.

Their partnership is being forged as the number of professional Shakespeare productions in the United States has fallen since the pandemic. “I’m calling it the Great Shakespeare Shrinkage,” said Ayanna Thompson, a Shakespeare scholar who is an English professor at Arizona State University and a member of the R.S.C. board. “There are whole swaths of the U.S. where you cannot see Shakespeare in a given year.”

At the same time, Shakespeare is one of the most popular playwrights on Broadway this season, with a fall production of “Romeo + Juliet” starring Kit Connor and Rachel Zegler and a spring

Edward Hall (above with his dog, Dennis) is the Chicago institution’s artistic director and the son of Peter Hall, founder of the R.S.C. Above right, Miriam O’Brien in the R.S.C.’s staging of “Pericles” in Chicago; below, the “Pericles” cast.



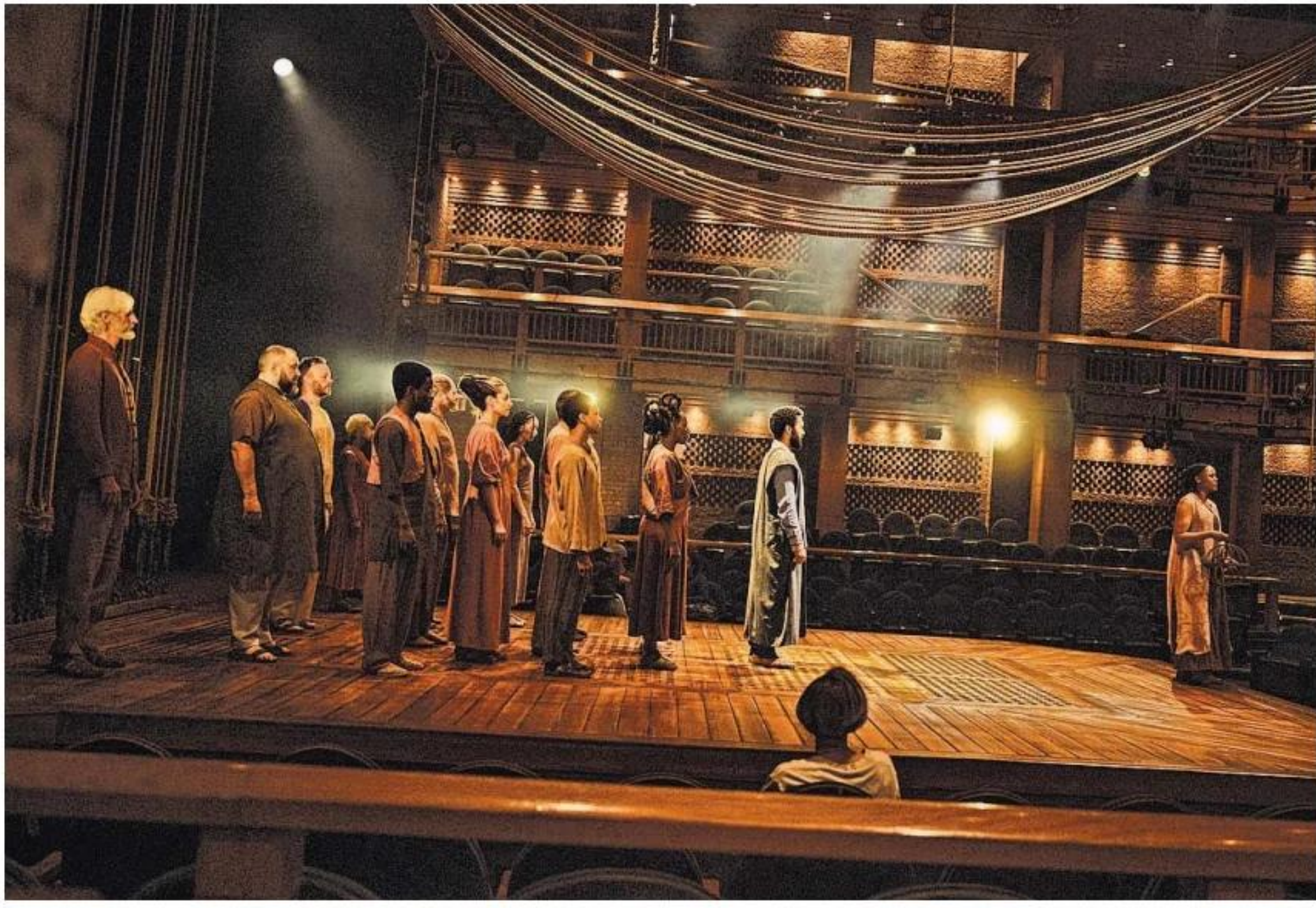
production of “Othello” starring Denzel Washington and Jake Gyllenhaal both selling strongly, while Off Broadway, at the Shed, Kenneth Branagh, an R.S.C. alum, is currently starring in “King Lear.”

The Chicago Shakespeare Theater is leaning hard into the partnership, emphasizing the R.S.C.’s long absence and its prestige in advertisements.

“We share a common love of Shakespeare, and it is important to our audiences that we continue with our commitment to the works of Shakespeare,” said Paulita Pike, the chair of the Chicago

theater’s board, who grew up in El Salvador, where she first encountered Shakespeare’s work in high school. “Part of what we’ve been focused on has been to take our work outside of Chicago, and to bring the world to Chicago, and this is a key part of that.”

It helped that Hall and the new R.S.C. leaders all knew each other from their days running smaller theaters in Britain. Hall started his own Shakespeare troupe (Propeller) and ran a London theater (Hampstead) before becoming the artistic director of the Chicago company last year. Harvey led Theatr Clwyd



in Wales, while Evans, familiar to Broadway audiences as the star of a 2008 “Sunday in the Park With George” revival, ran theaters in Sheffield and Chichester, England.

The R.S.C. leaders say the Chicago relationship is the start, but not the end, of their plans to resume presenting work in the United States.

“We’re in really active dialogue with a number of different theater companies and producers in New York,” Harvey said. “I don’t think we see it as an either/or. We would love to be bringing work and vibrating in both cities, and indeed others across the U.S.”

One project with stateside hopes: “Hamlet Hail to the Thief,” which is a mash-up of the Shakespeare tragedy and the Radiohead album. The project is scheduled to run in Manchester, England, next spring, and then at the R.S.C. next June; if all goes well in Britain it could have an American future.

While there has been Shakespeare performed in Stratford since the 19th century, the Royal Shakespeare Company was founded in its current form by Peter Hall in 1961. For a time, it transferred shows to Broadway with enough frequency that, in 1984, the critic Frank Rich wrote in The New York Times, “Much as we enjoy our annual ration of R.S.C. goodies, we can’t help regarding the R.S.C.’s prowess as God’s damning judgment on the failings of the New York theater.”

But it has not transferred a Shakespeare production to Broadway since 1996 (“A Midsummer Night’s Dream”) and it has not brought a new show to Broadway since 2015, when “Wolf Hall” opened. (The R.S.C., like Chicago Shakes, focuses on Shakespeare, but also develops work by other authors, including “Matilda the Musical,” which opened on Broadway in 2013 and continued to run there until 2017.)

The British company was also once a regular presence Off Broadway, occasionally on quite a grand scale. In 2011 for example, the company constructed a replica of its Royal Shakespeare Theater inside the drill hall at the Park Avenue Armory and brought over 46 shipping containers for a six-week residency in which it performed five Shakespeare plays. The company first performed at the Brooklyn Academy of Music in 1971 (“A Midsummer Night’s Dream,” directed by Peter Brook) and went on to become a regular presence there, bringing Vanessa Redgrave there to play Hecuba, David Tennant to play Richard II, and a “Julius Caesar” set in Africa.

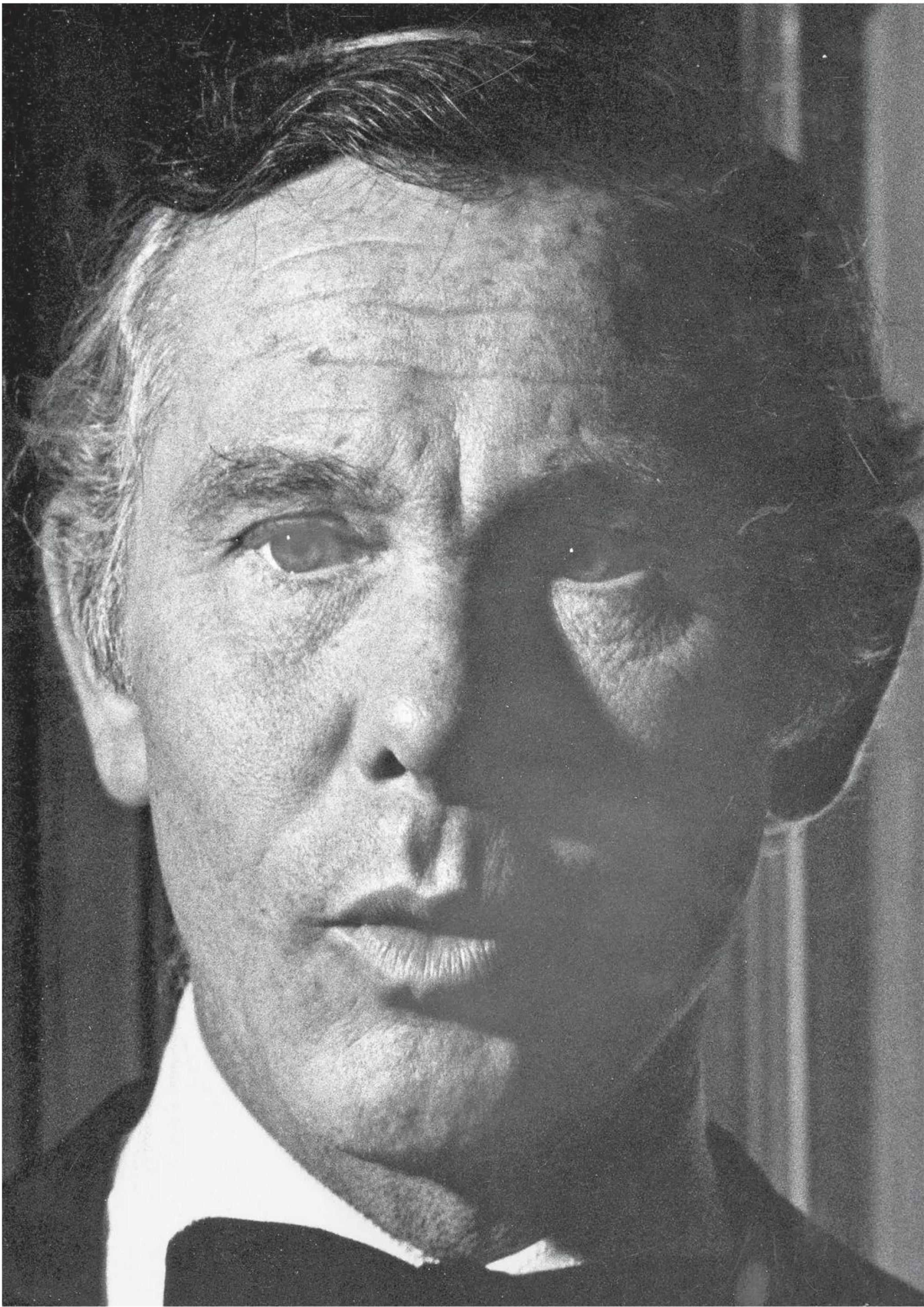
But the era of tours of that scale is past, and the last R.S.C. Off Broadway production of any size was “Timon of Athens,” which ran at Theater for a New Audience in Brooklyn in 2020, just before the pandemic forced theaters to close. In The New York Times, the critic Jesse Green called that production “short on troops.”

“The R.S.C. has tried to make inroads in a number of ways in the U.S., but their mission is British and their audience and their touring tends to be British,” said James Shapiro, a Shakespeare scholar who is a professor of English at Columbia University and served on the R.S.C.’s board of governors.

“The problem is always who is going to pay for it on this side, and what kind of long-term relationship can they establish. Maybe Chicago will be a beach-head.”

“There are whole swaths of the U.S. where you cannot see Shakespeare in a given year.”





RON GALELLA/RON GALELLA COLLECTION, VIA GETTY IMAGES

# Behind Johnny Carson's appeal

CARSON, FROM PAGE 16 more than challenge it. As Nora Ephron put it, he “never, ever made them think.” He was criticized for avoiding politics and controversy, with some unfavorably contrasting his work with the more daring shows of Dick Cavett. When asked about his competitor, Carson told *The New Yorker*: “The trouble with Dick is that he’s never decided what he wants to be — whether he’s going for the sophisticated, intellectual viewer or for the wider audience. He falls between two stools.”

Carson was laser-focused on the second stool. He arrived on the scene at exactly the moment television transitioned from a luxury device to an essential one. And he retired before the culture Balkanized, so his tenure took place when there were few options at 11:30 at night. But attributing his success only to impeccable timing gives him short shrift: He built an audience that was not there, and he did have competition, like turning off the television or talking to your spouse.

**VIEWERS CHOSE CARSON** because he gave them what they wanted, which was, to put it bluntly, a little bit of comedy and a little bit of sex. Let’s start with the first.

One of the striking things about Johnny Carson biographies is how little effort they spend on the actual comedy, let alone how radically it changed from its 90-minute (and longer) freewheeling version in the 1960s and ’70s to a more slickly showbiz style in later years. It’s like writing a book on Taylor Swift without analyzing the songs. Late-night talk show hosting is rarely treated as an art though it is in fact a tightly planned, highly artificial enterprise. But otherwise discerning people consider it simply a display of personality.

The most overlooked aspect of Carson’s appeal is that he was a comedy nerd. His characters, like Aunt Blabby and Floyd R. Turbo, look corny now,



GARRY NULL/NBCU PHOTO BANK, VIA GETTY IMAGES

but they killed in their day. Though he was known for his comic timing, it wasn’t off-the-cuff. It was the result of a lifetime of study. In interviews, Carson would protest that he didn’t know anything about comedy and insisted that breaking down jokes only ruined them. But at the University of Nebraska, he wrote his senior thesis on the art of comedy writing. It’s a fascinatingly technical analysis of the work of many of the most successful performers from the radio comedies of his youth like Jack Benny and Fred Allen.

He breaks down structure, character

and word choice, and concludes, among other points, that all comedy characters must be sympathetic. He explores ways to do this, including playing the fool and demonstrating common flaws. He notes that Bob Hope made himself a target for insults, thus allowing him to return to attack. “Once a comedian wins their sympathies,” he says of the audience, “he’ll win their confidence and they will go along with him on a gag.”

**WHAT YOU SEE** in Carson’s argument is a sensitivity to the importance of staying



MICHAEL OCHS ARCHIVES/GETTY IMAGES

‘The Tonight Show’ sold an old male fantasy about women.



FRED SABINE/NBCU PHOTO BANK, VIA GETTY IMAGES

likable for a comedian. While this often meant caution, it did not always. In his early years, he was even a bit edgy, introducing a risqué sexual humor to the masses that is now pervasive. Later, when he let us into his personal life through jokes about his failed marriages, he did more than any celebrity to normalize discussion of divorce in America. But he was always the hapless victim of these jokes, which boiled down the dissolution of his marriages to a financial transaction: He made the money and his wives took it.

The Carson jokes that linger the longest in the culture involve innuendo. In his most famous gag, after the actor Ed Ames, promoting the TV series “Daniel Boone,” threw a tomahawk at an outline of a cowboy that landed right under the crotch, Carson quipped, “I didn’t know you were Jewish.”

Carson’s most influential tool was that caught-in-the-cookie-jar voice he would use when making a slightly dirty double-entendre. You still hear Jon Stewart break into it any time he makes a sex joke. It was bold to utter these kinds of lines on television back then, especially on daytime, where Carson hosted a morning quiz show. In one episode, a bodybuilder guest compared the body to a home. Carson retorted: “My home is pretty messy, but I have a girl come in once a week to clean it out.”

He got away with this because he looked so boyishly innocent and brought matinee-idol looks to talk shows. In his first years on late night, he smoked on a set with a shag carpet in an environment that evoked a tamer Playboy Club. Indeed, his guests skewed heavily toward men, and there was a locker room-vibe to his exchanges with Don Rickles or Frank Sinatra.

“The Tonight Show” presented its audiences with a showbiz fantasy in which the beautiful and famous dressed up and chit-chatted like old friends. But it also sold an old male fantasy in which women tended to fall into two rigid categories: sex objects or nurturing mothers.

Told that the actress Valerie Perrine had complained that he told too many jokes about women’s breasts, Carson blamed her low-cut dresses. For women with higher necklines, he asked about children. Lily Tomlin said Carson seemed surprised when she told him on-air that she didn’t want kids. “For a female to say you didn’t even want children,” she said, “it was like: What’s wrong with her?”

And while he helped the careers of Roseanne Barr, Ellen DeGeneres and Joan Rivers (until she had the temerity to start her own show, after which she was banished), Carson booked many more male comics.

In Rolling Stone, Carson suggested there was something inherently antithetical about a funny woman. “It’s much tougher for women,” he said. “You don’t see many of them around. And the ones that try, sometimes are a little aggressive for my taste. I’ll take it from a guy, but from women, sometimes, it just doesn’t fit too well.”

Coming from the most important gatekeeper in comedy, this statement did more to set back women in comedy than a million dumb comments about female comics not being funny.

This is the ugly side of Carson’s power, one that the new book doesn’t investigate or really grapple with. Zehme covers Carson’s treatment of women, then struggles to defend it in the most hackneyed ways possible, psychoanalyzing the host’s relationship with his emotionally withholding mother or trying that old standby: blaming the times.

But the book is unflinching in its reporting. When the first of his four wives, Jody, describing a circum-

scribed life in which she was “captive” to the star, asks him to take her to a party, Carson replies, “Why take a ham sandwich to a banquet?” His second wife, Joanne, recalled a more harrowing marriage, filled with eruptions that she would have to clean up. When he drank, she faced “a tremendous anger about women that would come out.”

This is a version of Carson that wasn’t apparent on television. But the late-night talk show is an intimate form, and over thousands of hours of hosting, you will reveal yourself.

Watch some of those jokes; he wasn’t hiding as much as we thought. How much clearer could he be than when he joked: “Half the marriages end in divorce — and then there are the unhappy ones.”

That mean streak was evident in how he treated his sidekick, Ed McMahon, whose job, as he himself described it, was to laugh at his boss’s jokes and not be too funny. Carson regularly took shots at McMahon. In their dynamic, Carson wasn’t the one who drank a lot. The host cracked, “The first time Ed saw Niagara Falls, he asked, ‘Does that come with Scotch?’”

**YOU DIDN’T WATCH** the show to identify with Ed. Carson played the benevolent patriarch, but for many male viewers, the pleasure was imagining that you were Johnny, poised and in command, surrounded by flirtatious women and yes-men. Actual show business in the 1960s and ’70s was filled with activists and counterculture fervor, but “The Tonight Show” provided a break from all that, a return to “Mad Men”-era glamour. It presented a certain macho, nostalgic vision. America’s recent presidential election proves that can be a surprisingly potent pleasure.

Carson’s reputation for steering clear of politics has been overstated. Many politicians sat in the guest chair, and he made frequent jokes about them. Performing as master of ceremonies at a televised inaugural gala for Ronald Reagan would in today’s hot-house media environment draw huge criticism and become a culture war football. What mattered to him was keeping things sunny. In 1967, Robert F. Kennedy had to threaten to cancel his appearance on the show in order to be allowed to talk about poverty in America.

On his show, Carson kept his audience unsure of where he stood, in part because he was smart enough to suspect that if he was more transparent, some might not find him so funny.

He knew what to hold back, but also how to show just enough to play into visceral pleasure centers. Carson derided “Saturday Night Live” in its early years for being cruel, making the “kind of joke you tell at a private party,” but its pointed perspective was just closer to the surface.

Look again at his exchange with Geller. In dragging out the appearance, Carson is making the magician sweat, turning his anxiety into our amusement. This is the humor of embarrassment, a powerful staple of reality TV, prank shows and roasts. Carson even uses his characteristic pauses, not to set up a joke, but to extend the torture.

Then comes the knockout blow. Geller, defeated and flailing, desperately tries to hold onto some dignity by suggesting his mind-over-matter tricks went over better than they did. When Geller made a casual reference to the “bent spoon” in front of him, Carson did not withhold. Quietly, offhandedly, he pushes back: “A spoon that’s got a slight bend in it.”

It’s a subtle correction, delivered just gently enough to look like nothing. But it hits with the savage force of Jack Nicholson swinging an ax in “The Shining.” Looking to enjoy some old-fashioned American humiliation? Here’s Johnny!



# Making a statement on her own terms

LOS ANGELES

The Chvrches frontwoman Lauren Mayberry releases an empowering solo debut

BY PHOEBE REILLY

Lauren Mayberry was in the bunk of her band's tour bus in the winter of 2021, rolling between Denver and Boulder, Colo., when she started wondering how old Gwen Stefani was when she released her first solo record.

"I had an overly romantic notion of being in a band, this kind of 'Goonies' mentality," Mayberry said, referring to her role since 2011 as frontwoman for the Glaswegian synth-pop trio Chvrches. "I was very conscious of not wanting to be perceived as disloyal."

Despite her hesitation to step out on her own, "If the only reason you're not doing something is because of how it might make other people feel," she continued, "you're going to people-please yourself to death."

In the end, she took the plunge: Mayberry's solo debut, "Vicious Creature," due Dec. 6, is a fresh start that allows the singer and songwriter, 37, to approach her career from a different aesthetic and more empowering angle. Mayberry was only 23 when she joined Chvrches, years younger than her bandmates, the multi-instrumentalists Iain Cook and Martin Doherty. Over four albums, Cook and Doherty supplied a dizzying architecture of synth soundscapes that she filled with broody lyrics and her clarion vocals. The band inspired word-of-mouth buzz from the beginning — a little more than a year after anonymously releasing their first song, Chvrches were opening for Depeche Mode. But Mayberry worried her purpose was at times decorative.

"I remember feeling really out of my depth and lonely," she said.

Seated at her kitchen table in the cozy Los Angeles bungalow she shares with her musician boyfriend, Sam Stewart (son of the Eurythmics co-founder Dave), Mayberry quickly moved a scented candle before it burned the tail of their cat, Cactus. She admitted she would invoke the production term "quantizing" during early interviews without knowing its meaning, and flashed a droll smile when asked what distinguishes her solo songs from the Chvrches catalog. "Less synths," she replied.

"Vicious Creature" navigates an array of influences including punk, Brit-pop and piano-driven ballads. Mayberry's recent single "Crocodile Tears" features an aerobic beat reminiscent of '80s dance anthems. "What a man will say just to get his way / Always crying wolf so I'm sad to say / I don't really wanna hear it from you, babe," she sings, a kiss-off to toxic boyfriends. "I don't want it to be vengeful," she said. "I want it to feel freeing." So during live performances, she punctuates the chorus with pelvic thrusts and theatrical baying, laughing that her Chvrches bandmates probably would not want "wolf howls and choreography."

Mayberry teamed up with various producers and songwriters, including Dan McDougall (Ellie Goulding, Liam Gallagher), Ethan Gruska (Phoebe Bridgers) and, after some hesitation, her boyfriend, Stewart, who has worked with Olivia Rodrigo and Chappell Roan.

("My manager said it's like having a Ferrari in your house and not driving it," she said.)

Some songs arrived by accident, like the album's undulant, All Saints-channeling opener, "Something in the Air," about a famous Britpop frontman with a penchant for conspiracy theories whom Mayberry and McDougall met in a London studio while she was struggling with writer's block. "He thought he was in a safe space," she said, and thus declined to name him.

Several of the 12 tracks put a sizable target on the male ego. The buoyant, puckish single "Change Shapes" expresses fatigue with always accommodating other people, while "Sorry, Etc" is a hyper, drum-and-bass driven screed about the sacrifices required to be "one of the boys." "Don't cry, we're just getting to the good part," Mayberry taunts in the chorus. "What happened? You were being such a good sport."

Growing up in Glasgow, Mayberry studied piano and drums, and played in bands. She was inspired by artists like Annie Lennox and Sleater-Kinney, but in school she embraced music that she thought her male bandmates were more likely to approve of, especially after being mocked by a boyfriend for buying an Avril Lavigne CD.

"I was kind of studying their universe so that I could learn it well enough and be allowed in," Mayberry said. "I'm going to know more about Fugazi B-sides, but when I get home I'm going to listen to 'Under the Pink.'" she added, referring to the Tori Amos album.

Several of the album's 12 tracks put a sizable target on the male ego.

The stigma of standing out followed her to Chvrches. Over the years, she said, she repeatedly declined requests to step apart from Cook and Doherty, whether for magazine profiles or songwriting opportunities. At the same time, she was singled out for harassment and online threats to the point where she wrote a Guardian column about her experience. "I've definitely white-knuckled through some things that were not cool," she said.

In early 2022, she broke the news to the guys that she was attempting a solo project. The band was touring Chvrches' fourth album, "Screen Violence," on which Mayberry exerted more influence by pushing for a general horror concept but then "secretly made a sad feminist album," she said, drenching herself in fake blood for every performance.

"I didn't want anybody to be blindsided," Mayberry recalled of the announcement. "I understand there was an inbuilt fear that if the singer does something else, they won't come back." She described their reaction as "a coming-to-terms journey," but Chvrches continued to tour, and it helped that the trio had committed to two more albums with their new Stateside label, Island Records, who are also releasing "Vicious Creature."

At the suggestion of her management, Mayberry reunited with the producer Greg Kurstin, who worked on Chvrches' third album, "Love Is Dead." "I was so interested to hear where she was going musically," Kurstin said, via phone. "The challenge was what kind of organic sounds can we use to create a different space from Chvrches that still fit with Lauren's world?" The lush track "Sunday Best" opens with a homage to Fat-



EMILY ROSSER FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

Lauren Mayberry will soon be preparing for a "Vicious Creature" tour that kicks off in early 2025, although she has already been playing songs from the album live for more than a year. Below left, Mayberry onstage in 2023.



JC OLIVERA/GETTY IMAGES

Like That . . ." which caused the fan favorite Aidan (John Corbett) to fall from her favor. "Hot take — Carrie should've ended up with the piss politician," she said, referring to a "Sex and the City" character (John Slattery) with a memorable kink. "Aidan kept trying to change her."

Mayberry will soon be preparing for a "Vicious Creature" tour that kicks off in early 2025, although she has already been playing songs from the album live for more than a year. "I wanted to get people familiar with the concept of this happening," she said, "and learn a bit about what I am like on the stage without Iain and Martin."

Her first solo show in late 2023 sold out the 9:30 Club in Washington, D.C., after the release of only one song, the piano ballad "Are You Awake?" "We're playing venues that Chvrches played a decade ago," she said. "People have come just to see what this might be like. I found that very moving."

There's at least one song that Mayberry has yet to perform live: the heart-breaking ballad "Oh, Mother." Written with Mayberry's friend McDougall and inspired by a family illness, the track flips the script on Harry Chapin's "Cat's in the Hat" to observe a parent from the shifting perspective of a daughter throughout various life stages. The effect is no less devastating when the plangent piano underscores Mayberry's fragile concluding verse, "Oh, mother, what will I do without you?" It was the last thing they wrote for the record.

"We had a little sob and then got Nando's," she said, referring to the chicken joint that's a U.K. favorite. "We're British at the end of the day."

Backed by an all-female and non-binary band onstage, Mayberry possesses the same command as frontwoman that she did with Chvrches, but with more dramatic flourish. Her moves were conceived over wine nights with Kong, and later at a gym in nearby Pasadena. "Let's Fosse the [expletive] out of it," she recalled Kong saying. The mic stand is occasionally deployed as a phallic symbol during "Crocodile Tears," and Mayberry sometimes opens the witchy, ambient track "Mantra" by sitting played on a box.

"My goal is to give the audience more to watch, especially when you're trying to develop a new persona," Kong said, via phone. "There's no rules, which allowed some cool things that maybe she never would've done in Chvrches."

After nearly two decades of playing in bands, Mayberry agreed that her experience as a solo artist has already allowed her a liberating amount of creative control. "I'm the grown-up in the room," she said. "I can actually enjoy this for what it is."

boy Slim's 1998 banger "Praise You" before deploying handclaps and strings to cushion Mayberry's melancholic chorus about finding "freedom in goodbyes."

"I wanted to channel more primitive technology," Kurstin added. "It could be electronic, but not electronic in the way of Chvrches."

The title of the album comes from Mayberry's lyric "nostalgia is a vicious creature" from the lilting pop track "A Work of Fiction." On a drive to a nearby bar in late October, she wondered aloud what exactly she is wistful for. "Maybe for a time where I felt more innocent or something," she said. Dressed in a My Bloody Valentine T-shirt, a black watch-plaid skirt and cherry-red sunglasses, Mayberry poked fun at herself for weeping at anything related to girlhood. She remembered crying in a Santa Clara, Calif., parking lot with her friend and choreographer Meagan Kong hours before one of Taylor Swift's Eras Tour performances.

"All these families traveled here for their daughters and they're validating and centering her interests," Mayberry said. "My friend was like, 'We're not even at the venue yet. You need to pace yourself.'"

While she waited for a lager, Mayberry chatted about her favorite TV shows. Even in her spare time she can't escape her fascination with the misdeeds of men. Twenty minutes were spent discussing "Tell Me Lies," Hulu's tense Y.A. drama about a sociopathic boyfriend, before pivoting to "And Just



EMILY ROSSER FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES



# Devotion means not leaving the room

An abandoned dog needed a steady presence in her life. So did I.

## Modern Love

BY ERIKA RAMSDALE

One morning, leaving for work, I stepped outside the gate of my apartment building and heard a rustle of activity to my left. I turned to see a tiny dog trotting toward me on the sidewalk, looking nervously back at a knot of people who were following and calling out.

An escapee, I thought, as the dog, a Chihuahua, reached me, jumped up on my legs and looked at me beseechingly. Without thinking, I bent down, picked her up and held her out to her followers.

Their hands flapped in the air as they all murmured in a disjointed chorus, “No, no, someone just threw her out of a car window, we wanted to get her out of the busy road, good luck,” their voices trailing off as they about-faced and disappeared down the block.

I looked down. The little dog was trembling in my arms. I sighed and took her inside, where my sweet, faithful old mutt had already settled in for his morning nap. He too sighed, watching her from his bed as she fluttered about the apartment, tapping out an anxious rhythm on the wood floors.

I was in my early 30s and an oncology fellow at the University of Chicago. Medicine had called me with a message of job security and financial stability, not human connection and healing. While I was growing up, vocations always seemed to me a luxury.

“Never depend on anyone for money,” my grandmother often said, apropos of nothing.

Like many doctors, I thought my primary duty was to counter uncertainty with facts. The field of oncology was, and still is, breathtakingly prolific at generating new facts, and I had a growing sense of mastery over doubt and disease.

During my fellowship, I had met and fallen in love with a charismatic profes-



BRIAN REA

sor at the university. She had a roguish tilt to her head and spoke with compelling, declarative certainty. She blazed through the world fearlessly.

I was awe-struck. Creating a future with her felt like simply a matter of manifesting an inevitable trajectory. We built up and put all our stock in a detailed accounting of what would unfold, down to the names of our hypothetical children.

A few months before the Chihuahua appeared, however, the one-two punch of a serious health scare and an unexpected, shattering death punctured our serene bubble. We found out we were not suited to facing harsh realities

together.

For my part, I had no idea how to hold steady for her in the face of her grief and fear. To see such a powerful force laid low by random cruelties overwhelmed my capacity to respond. Tempers flared, and distance grew.

And then this Chihuahua came into our lives. I named her Iota. She was a traumatized creature. Her separation anxiety was so severe that she would chew on her own body, opening wounds on her legs and belly. She would hurl herself against doors and furniture and the walls of the crate I set up as a safe space for her. She would eat her feces, vomit and eat that

in an endless cycle until interrupted. She screeched and wailed when I was not in her line of sight.

The veterinarian said she was physically healthy and perhaps a year old. She did not have a microchip or a collar. I put up fliers in the neighborhood, but nobody called. I knew that if I took her to a shelter, she would be euthanized. The veterinarian recommended an antidepressant, beef flavored.

Her needs were overwhelming. I would sometimes have to leave her, walk away to another room, and focus on my breathing to dispel the sensation of engulfment. Iota's arrival was the death knell for a relationship already coasting to a stop on the evaporating fumes of forever hopes.

“It's that dog or me,” my girlfriend said.

I didn't know how to face the dissolution of our future together. Like Iota, I fluttered around the apartment, tapping out an anxious rhythm on the wood floors. An impulsive, ill-considered fling with an acquaintance from the neighborhood provided some distraction — that is, until he forced his way into my home, pushed me to the ground, put his arm around my neck and squeezed until I stopped struggling.

After he released me and drifted out of my apartment, I called the police. I found my dogs huddled, terrified, in a closet. I went to the same emergency room where I sometimes saw patients. I spied some of my colleagues walking by through the gap in the curtain. I got my bruises photographed.

I pursued a restraining order and pressed charges. I sat in seemingly endless courthouse waiting rooms with silent women, many of them with bruises still blooming on their faces. I had to stand next to my assailant as I testified at the trial, trembling. I was not allowed in the courtroom as my assailant testified; I sat on a bench outside, alone.

The cop who responded to my call emerged from the courtroom after testifying and hugged me as I sobbed a thank you. Other observers trickled out, offering support: “He is guilty as sin, no question. Don't worry.”

He was found not guilty; my word against his, the judge said. The restraining order was dropped. For months I was afraid to leave my house, and I was hypervigilant to the point of exhaustion. Panic attacks left me breathless and faint on my walk to work and in the hallways of the hospital. My social network was interconnected with my attacker's, and it collapsed when most people chose to withdraw rather than face an uncomfortable choice.

It was because of Iota that I eventually made a tentative outreach toward a new network. She needed socialization, I rationalized. She needed to learn how to trust again and find her bearing. Three blocks from my apartment was a small park where the dog people of the neighborhood congregated every afternoon, the dogs running off leash between clusters of their guardians.

Iota was embarrassingly belligerent. In her fear, she launched herself through the air at dogs and people like Monty Python's killer Rabbit of Caerbannog.

The dogs largely ignored her, and the dog people set about trying to help. They formed a betting pool around who could win over Iota's trust first. They competed earnestly for this honor. Weeks passed without a lot of progress.

One day, a man showed up at the park who appeared to be known to the dog people, if not to me. He approached the edge of the gathering and sat down on the grass, turning his face to the sky. I watched as Iota trotted up to him, placed her front legs on his, looked up at him for a moment, then jumped into his lap and settled in. The members of the betting pool were furious.

I got to know Kevin over the subsequent days and weeks as we talked under the spring-blooming trees of the park. I could tell he was interested in me, but his flirtation was muted, inquisitive, respectful. Iota, for her part, was enamored of him.

We spent more time together, punctuated by my alternating cycles of panic and detachment. It was the wrong time, the wrongest time, to build any sort of healthy foundation for a functional, loving relationship.

**Iota used to screech and wail whenever I was not in her line of sight.**

My needs were overwhelming. But he did not leave the room. He was steady, true-blue.

We have been married for almost 10 years now. Iota will always choose to be near one of us, typically curled up and gently snoring, though she no longer needs to see us to trust in her own safety. When our children were born (first a son, then, two years later, a daughter), she took it upon herself to keep careful watch over the bassinet from her perch on the edge of our bed, coming to retrieve us when they flailed or fussed.

Her airborne launches are now only at the geese who infiltrate our yard, on days her arthritis is not bothering her. She preens and struts as they flee from her.

I frequently tell a lighthearted, sanitized version of how I met Kevin. “My Chihuahua chose my husband,” I say with a laugh. I rarely tell the darker version. I still have a hollowed-out place in me where the anger and fear reside, and where I go to examine them sometimes.

In a strange way, with time, that hollow has developed a new kind of heaviness that grounds me, keeps me steady as I am sitting with patients in their anguish and dread, when facts are insubstantial. I meet them where they are, where my husband met me, in a place where I know something can yet be built.

*Erika Ramsdale is an oncologist in Rochester, N.Y.*

# My mom voted for Trump. Can we all just let it go?

## The Ethicist

BY KWAME ANTHONY APPIAH

*My mother, a two-time Trump voter in Florida, has moved closer to us in a safely blue state. While I don't know what her vote was in the 2024 presidential election, it wouldn't have affected the outcome. I strongly oppose Trump, as do my wife and her family, who live nearby. I'm troubled by my mother's support of someone I consider morally abhorrent and dangerous, especially when she voted in a former swing state.*

*With the result of the 2024 election, my wife and her family are directing their understandable fury at my mother. My wife's sister said, “If she voted for Trump again, I'm completely done with her.” I expect that the next time they interact it will not be pretty. But my mother is a member of our family, and an invaluable caregiver to our children. She's pleasant and kind in daily life and moved far from her home primarily for us and her grandkids. And she is my mother, after all.*

*I'm torn. My wife and her family expect me to brook no compromise and to speak out on an issue that feels existential to them (as it does to me), but because I know that her vote here doesn't make a difference, I have trouble feeling motivated to admonish her for her past and possibly present support of Trump. At the very least, they don't think I should expect them to be anything other than completely unfettered with my mother.*

*I appreciate the sacrifices my mother has made to be near our family and our children, and our kids love their grandma. And she is the woman who raised me. But my wife and her family will be channeling their anger at one of the few Trump voters they personally know. And my mother expects me to intervene and speak up for her or to*

*encourage my wife's family to be more civil. She sees her vote as a “personal choice” and doesn't seem to believe that she should be criticized for it.*

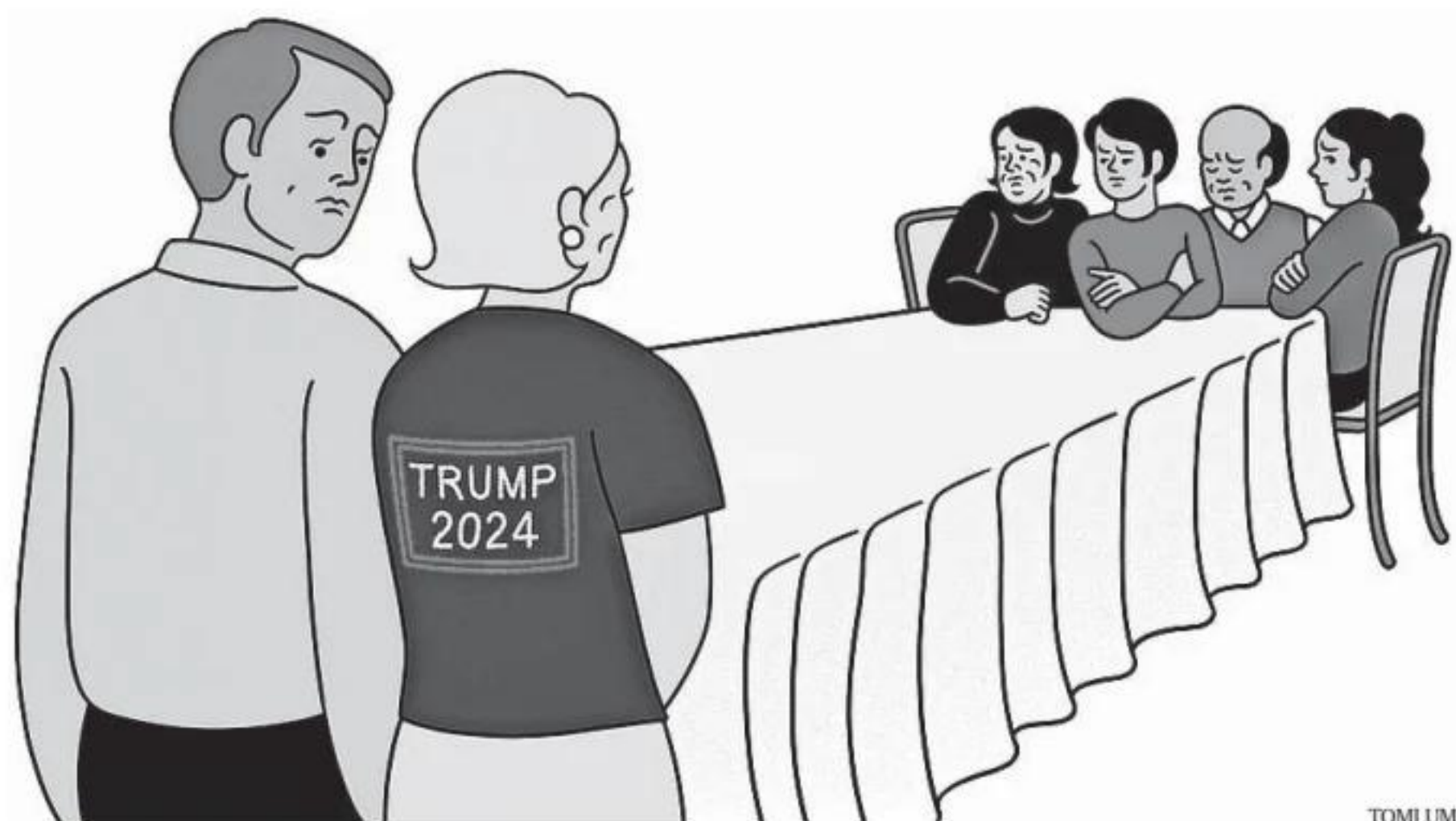
*Is it wrong for me to hold my tongue or to try to negotiate peace even though I agree with my wife's family's position? If I try to protect my mother from vitriol, would I be betraying myself, or my wife and her family, in order to preserve harmony and child care?*

*Or would I be justified in suggesting that we all lay down our arms, given that her vote no longer affects the national outcome? If I try to completely opt out of having a role in this conflict, am I doing a disservice to all parties involved? What do we owe to ourselves and the respective warring sides in a situation such as this? — Name Withheld*

**THIS IS A SAD** but not unusual story. Political scientists have identified a form of animus they sometimes call partyism, which they try to measure in various ways. They can ask respondents whether people of the other political party have positive traits (generosity, say, or honesty), or bad ones (selfishness, untrustworthiness); they can ask what people think about being friends with supporters of the other party or about their children marrying across the partisan divide.

Since at least 2000, the research suggests, people's positive feelings about their own party have stayed roughly constant; the big drop, which has intensified since 2016, is in positive feelings toward the *other* side. In an era when few Americans are still bothered by interracial marriage, recent surveys find that a large percentage of people who identify as Democrats or Republicans want their children to marry within the party. And the trend isn't just found in America: Partyism swamps other sources of intergroup hostility in Britain, Belgium and Spain, too.

One way in which these attitudes



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can be rationalized is by insisting that members of the other party are making the wrong choices because they are wicked or stupid or both. Yet voting for morally reprehensible candidates doesn't mean you necessarily share their vices. You will almost certainly be voting with a focus on the good things you hope they will do or with the belief that they will do more good than their opponents.

You might have gotten something wrong — about how the world works, about what they will do, about what is good. Others can complain that you didn't do your due diligence. Still, most Democrats, like most Republicans, are bound to have a lot of erroneous beliefs about what their candidate would have done. A preponderance of voters will fall short when it comes to meeting the standards of due diligence.

At the same time, your mother is, as you say, mistaken to speak of her vote as if it were nobody else's business. For these purposes, the causal consequences of how she voted, in one state or another, is a distraction. It isn't that any of us is casting the determining vote; it's that we're joining with others to achieve the results we favor, collectively sharing responsibility for the outcome if we succeed. And because she has been open about her previous two votes, people who know her are entitled to ask her why she cast them. If they can't make sense of her answer, they're free to reproach her or express their disappointment. That goes for you as well: Treating your mother with

respect means being honest about your views.

But it doesn't mean cudgeling her with them. Once you've said your piece and listened to what she has to say in her defense, repeating the same arguments over and over would be the act of a bully. Citizens, let alone family members, shouldn't be eager to direct vitriol against people whose political views they don't share. If the rest of your family wants to go on doing that, you should tell them that they're being unkind and unhelpful.

Partyism is a morally debased form of political discourse. A friend of mine who is active in progressive politics and served in the Biden administration has a mother who voted for Trump. The mother, who is Black, Southern and religiously devout, is a single-issue voter: She's fervently opposed to abortion. My friend deeply disagrees with her mother's position but finds it intelligible. They've made their peace.

I hope the members of your family will too. Today, family gatherings routinely unite Catholics and Protestants, Jews and gentiles, Baptists and Episcopalians, Blacks and whites and Latinos and Asians; not so long ago, they could unite Democrats and Republicans. In perfect harmony? Far from it. But it helps to remember people are more than the sum of their political views — and that intolerance has a habit of breeding intolerance.

*My Trump-supporter friends understand that he's a liar and adulterer but*

*adamantly defend him with reasoning like “Everyone lies — have you not lied before?” or “My dad's an extremely trustworthy guy even though he cheated on my mom a couple of times — so what?” I understand they are rationalizing to feel good about their candidate, but is it ethical to be hypocritical? — Name Withheld*

**YES, EVERYBODY LIES.** Still, lying about private matters, matters you think are nobody else's business, may be quite different from lying about public matters in order to manipulate others into doing what you want. We may think of honesty as a unitary “global trait” — such that people are either honest across the board or not — but there's research in moral psychology that argues otherwise. The philosopher Rachana Kamtekar, reviewing some empirical studies of honesty and other virtues, has argued that people might have “cross-situational consistency” if we start to think in terms of more specific traits, like “honesty with respect to property.” Cheating on your wife, similarly, might not indicate that you're more likely to cheat in other ways.

Maybe what your friends really mean is that, though they might have preferred a president who showed greater fidelity to the truth and to his wives, these traits are less important to them than other traits that they actively favor. What they shouldn't commit themselves to is the position that you can't criticize someone for doing something you have done yourself.

It also seems hard to dispute that, as David Leonhardt, Ian Prasad Philbrick and Stuart A. Thompson have argued in The Times, Trump has lied on a scale that outstrips his presidential predecessors. But we can put aside the tally. Hypocrisy, in Rochefoucauld's deathless line, is the tribute vice pays to virtue. Society would founder if we had to be blameless to stand up for the values we hold dear.

*Kwame Anthony Appiah teaches philosophy at N.Y.U. His books include “Cosmopolitanism,” “The Honor Code” and “The Lies That Bind: Rethinking Identity.”*



# Zippy jaunt in a city of cool haunts

A hit of history and hustle in districts that hum with dining, nightlife and art

## 36 Hours in . . . Atlanta

BY RICHARD FAUSSET

If Savannah, Charleston or New Orleans ever boasts of exuding more Southern charm per square inch, Atlanta might well respond, “Bless their hearts.” The de facto capital of the American South moves with too much muscle and speed to be bothered by such quaint notions, secure in its position as a nexus of civil rights history, capitalist hustle, Black creativity and (thanks to generous state tax credits) TV and film production. Beyond the traffic-choked highways, Atlanta’s older, more central neighborhoods actually offer abundant charm, thrumming with dining, nightlife and art. A key catalyst has been the Atlanta Beltline, the partly constructed 22-mile (35-kilometer) walking and biking path that has connected old parts of town in fresh ways, bringing revitalization and giving locals and visitors alike a place to enjoy the city outside their cars.

### FRIDAY

#### 3:30 P.M. | WALK KING’S WALK

Atlanta’s spiritual mission is spelled out in the civil rights landmarks along Auburn Avenue, the historic Black business corridor just east of downtown where the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. grew up and later preached. Start at the old brick chapel of Ebenezer Baptist Church, which is overseen by the National Park Service (free admission). Find a seat in the pews, close your eyes and listen to recordings of King’s sermons from the 1960s that play on the sound system. Walk a minute east to see the crypts of King and his wife, Coretta Scott King, before continuing past an elegant stretch of Queen Anne-style houses, among them M.L.K.’s birth home (currently closed for renovation). End your walk with a fresh-fruit cup (from about \$5) from LottaFrutta, Auburn Avenue’s beloved pan-Latin frutería.

#### 6 P.M. | HIT A CULINARY HOMER

The Atlanta Braves’ 2013 decision to leave the struggling Summerhill neighborhood, just south of downtown, for a new stadium in the suburbs was met with lusty boos by city dwellers. Since then, however, all kinds of cool things have sprouted along Georgia Avenue, the neighborhood’s main street. Have a pilsner (about \$6) and a chat at Halfway Crooks, a quirky and welcoming beer hall. Shop for some wine and gifts, like a set of Willie Nelson-themed cocktail napkins (\$54), at Press Shop. Nosh on jalapeño johnnycakes (part of a \$12 bread plate) at Southern National, an upscale import from Mobile, Ala. At Little Bear, an unpretentious but daring small-plates bistro, a sorbet of scuppernong, a beloved Southern grape variety, incorporates hints of coffee, corn and ají dulce, the habanero’s mellow cousin (\$8).

#### 11 P.M. | DANCE TILL THE WEE HOURS

Atlanta’s famous hip-hop scene has long been tangled up in its strip club culture, but there are other, less prurient ways to feel the 808s rattle your teeth. On Edgewood Avenue, Harold’s Chicken & Ice Bar, a popular spot for gizzards and giblets, becomes a joyous, bumping dance club on weekend nights, attracting a crowd of 20- to 40-somethings. Usually at the controls on Fridays is Chris Marks, who spins records under the moniker CM the DJ. Atlanta hip-hop has evolved to contain multitudes — by turns socially conscious, psychedelic, ruminative, daring and just plain weird. But Mr. Marks’s ecstatic sets (no cover) are built for dancing, and tend to feature an array of Southern draws from Memphis to Texas to just down the street.

### SATURDAY

#### 10 A.M. | DO BOHEMIAN BREAKFAST

The Carroll Street Cafe is the social hub of Cabbagetown, an old millworkers’ neighborhood east of downtown crowded with small, brightly painted cottages, and home to artists, musicians and eccentric types. Find a table outside set along the impossibly narrow street, order a mimosa (\$11) and absorb your neighbors’ chatter, which might touch on the glories of drop-D guitar tuning or job leads for gaffers (the local movie industry — call it Y’allywood at your peril — has a toehold here). Afterward, stroll north along Carroll Street, then turn right on what becomes Wylie Street, adorned with some of the city’s most striking public murals. A few blocks on, a left turn takes you through the Krog Street tunnel, where a riot of graffiti serves as a favored backdrop for rap videos and photo shoots.



PHOTOGRAPHS BY BEN ROLLS FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES



#### NOON | WANDER UP THE BELTLINE

The busiest stretch of the Beltline, the Eastside Trail, begins at the Krog tunnel and extends about two and a half miles north to the lovely green slopes of Piedmont Park. The Beltline has been transformative for a city that for decades was organized around the car. And though its success has prompted serious concerns about gentrification, it seems that Atlanta, finally, can see itself, particularly on weekends, when the path is crammed with flirting teenagers, exercise freaks, extrovert roller skaters, buskers and cool kids rocking complicated sneakers from the future. Explore Ponce City Market, a mall and food court set in a reconditioned former Sears distribution center. Refresh at Pub on Ponce, which is set in a Kroger supermarket and serves beer and wine through a window onto a patio that can feel like the city’s front porch.

#### 4 P.M. | TAKE IN FOLK ART

The High Museum of Art’s folk art collection is among the South’s best, featuring works from Howard Finster, the Georgia preacher whose idiosyncratic, funny and dreamlike work has been championed by the Athens, Ga., rock band R.E.M., among others. In the last few years, the High has taken special

care to feature Black art, reinforcing Atlanta’s reputation as a center of Black expression and ideas. Current shows include a photo exhibition from Tyler Mitchell, the first Black artist to shoot the cover of Vogue (through Dec. 1); “Giants,” a selection of work from the collection of the musician couple Alicia Keys and Kasseem Dean, also known as Swizz Beats (through Jan. 19); and highlights from the museum’s growing collection of spectacular African American quilts (through Jan. 5).

#### 8 P.M. | FALL FOR EAST ATLANTA

Camila Cabello’s 2017 pop hit “Havana” rhymed the Cuban capital with the low-key neighborhood of East Atlanta (ooh na na) as it described a geographically knotty 21st-century romance. But a night out in East Atlanta Village, a scruffy cluster of bars, restaurants and shops, will have you falling in love with all kinds of cultures in the same place. Seek out São Paulo-style pizza, with its surprising toppings like Brie and pepper jam (\$22) at Brasiliana. Order Jack Daniels shots (\$8) for new tattooed friends in old Motörhead T-shirts at Flatiron Bar. At the farm-to-table stand-out Banshee, a plate of late-summer malfatti dumplings (\$30) recently on offer featured squash, sun-dried toma-

toes, capers and smoky Benton’s bacon. Banshee morphs into a dance club (free admission) at around 11 p.m.

### SUNDAY

#### 9:30 A.M. | VISIT A MARKET

The Grant Park Farmers Market takes place every Sunday in the historic neighborhood that bears the same name. The best treats — fresh peaches and tomatoes — are to be found in the summertime, but there are reasons to visit all year long. Pick up a jar of duck liver pâté with black-cherry aspic (\$12) from the Spotted Trotter, a local butcher, and a baguette from TGM Bread (\$3) for an easy picnic. And be sure to tolerate the long lines at the Little Tart, the local bakery chain founded by Sarah O’Brien, Atlanta’s perfectionist virtuoso of viennoiserie. Gobble her Parisian-level butter croissant (\$4.50) right there; take home a box of vegan blueberry-lemon cornmeal cookies (\$2.65 each) for your friends.

#### NOON | GET YOUR GARDEN ON

In much of the rural South, the family garden plot has never gone out of style, and the garden club remains a backbone of civic life in the South’s small towns. The Atlanta Botanical Garden (adult tickets, \$29.95) implicitly honors such

Clockwise from above: the Eastside Trail, the busiest stretch of the Beltline; Harold’s Chicken & Ice Bar, a dance club on weekend nights; the High Museum of Art, which has taken special care to feature Black art; Piedmont Park; and a dish at the Carroll Street Cafe.

### KEY STOPS

**Auburn Avenue**, in the heart of the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.’s old neighborhood, is studded with history.

**The Beltline Eastside Trail** is where the new Atlanta exercises, flirts, roller-skates, shops, wines and dines.

**East Atlanta Village** is a nightlife hub that offers Brazilian pizza, indie rock, fine dining and dancing.

### WHERE TO EAT

**LottaFrutta** is a beloved pan-Latin fruit-cup vendor and cafe near M.L.K.’s birth home.

**Southern National** offers a fine-dining take on Southern cuisine.

**Carroll Street Cafe**, at the core of bohemian Cabbagetown, features outdoor tables set along a lively street.

**Brasiliana** serves São Paulo-style pizzas, with toppings like pepper jam, boiled eggs and truffle olive oil.

**Flatiron Bar** is a no-nonsense hangout with rock ‘n’ roll on the sound system.

**Mary’s East Atlanta** is a friendly gay bar known for its karaoke.

### WHERE TO STAY

**Forth Atlanta**, just off the Beltline Eastside Trail, opened in July, setting a marker for the style-conscious wave of revitalization roaring through the city’s Old Fourth Ward neighborhood. The 196-room hotel features a number of dining and drinking options. Rooms start at \$345.

**Hotel Clermont**, for years a heap of broken dreams and dodgy characters straight out of the Tom Waits songbook, has in recent years been cheekily reimagined, boutique-style, with vintage-inspired décor, a rooftop bar and a terrific French restaurant. Rooms start at about \$219.

**The Darwin Hotel** is set in a workaday building that originally housed laborers who came for the 1996 Summer Olympics. It now serves as a simple, affordable in-town hotel option. Rooms start at about \$179.

For **short-term rentals**, visitors, particularly those with children, should check out the leafy Grant Park neighborhood, home of Zoo Atlanta.

traditions, and takes them to new heights across 30 walkable acres (12 hectares) that include the delicate beauties of the Fuqua Orchid Center, in two dedicated display houses. Exquisite, botanically inspired glass sculptures by the artist Dale Chihuly are on permanent display, and the garden often hosts other temporary sculpture exhibits. Note there are no bad-weather refunds. But ducking into a room full of orchids to escape a Georgia thunderstorm might make for the perfect sensuous coda to your trip.





SANTOS  
DE  
*Cartier*





**Global gifts** Klein Constantia in South Africa. “Sweet wines are our business — we make Vin de Constance, one of the top sweet wines in the world,” said Matthew Day, the estate’s winemaker. “But if you ask anyone on the street, ‘What is the best sweet wine?’ — it’s Château d’Yquem.”

# Winemakers’ tips for special sipping

Here are several bottles, produced in France, New Zealand and beyond, that they would love to give or receive

BY VICTORIA GOMELSKY

David Duncan, the president and chief executive of Silver Oak Cellars in California’s Napa Valley, has a stock answer when people ask him what he drinks when he is not drinking his own wine.

“I drink my friends’ wines,” Mr. Duncan said on a video call last month from New York City, where he was attending an event.

“I have a saying that one of my favorite wine descriptors is ‘trust,’ he said. “Giving somebody a funky bottle of orange wine might be interesting, but I think you want to give something that you know they’ll like.”

But how can you be sure what that would be?

The New York Times asked Mr. Duncan and five other winemakers around the globe — including Cristián Vallejo of Vik in the Millahue Valley of Chile; Matthew Day of Klein Constantia in the Constantia region of South Africa; Donae Burston of La Fête Wine Com-



**CRISTIÁN VALLEJO**  
Chief winemaker at Vik, Millahue Valley, Chile

I’ve worked in Bordeaux four times and have a special connection with Médoc and Saint-Émilion. I really got into the culture of wine in that region.

An amazing wine to give as a gift is Château Léoville Poyferré from Saint-Julien. Also, Cos d’Estournel from Saint-Estèphe and La Conseillante from Pomerol.

My sister is a winemaker, too, and she just spent two weeks working at Léoville Poyferré with Isabelle Davin, the winemaker. While she was there, she visited La Conseillante, the neighbor of Château Pétrus. La Conseillante has a beautiful expression. It’s not a premier grand cru but the quality is amazing. It’s a wine that delivers a lot of quality for a reasonable price.

Léoville is the same: Saint-Julien has a tension in the tannins that I love. Always when I make my wines, I want that tension. It also has a reasonable price for the quality it delivers. If you find the 2004, even better, because that’s when I worked there.



**MATTHEW DAY**  
Winemaker at Klein Constantia, Constantia, South Africa

Sweet wines are our business — we make Vin de Constance, one of the top sweet wines in the world. But if you ask anyone on the street, “What is the best sweet wine?” — it’s Château d’Yquem. It’s in the Sauternes region of France, the most iconic region. The farm has been around for hundreds of years. It’s owned by Bernard Arnault, the head of LVMH Moët Hennessy Louis Vuitton. It is the prized estate in the range.

It has a dried apricot, honeysuckle character and quite a bit of oak coming through. But the wine always tastes the same: lots of citrus and lots of zest. No other wine in the world, other than sweet wines like ports or Madeiras, will last as long. Because of the sugar, the

**Recommendations range from \$27 for a sparkling wine to more than \$1,000 for vintages.**

pany, a producer in Provence with headquarters in Miami; Judy Chan of Grace Vineyard in Shanxi Province and in the Ningxia region of China; and Helen Masters of Ata Rangi in Martinborough, New Zealand — to recommend a wine (or three) that they would love to give or receive.

Given the limitations of international distribution, not all the wines will be easy to procure, nor will they fall under everyone’s budget (the recommendations range from \$27 for a sparkling wine to more than \$1,000 for select vintages). But should you find them, or visit the regions where they are produced, they might complement a special occasion.

“For me, it’s really hard to buy things for people,” Ms. Masters said. “I don’t want to buy things they don’t want. But I know a bottle of wine — especially as we get older — is one of those gifts that will, most of the time, be understood and accepted. The effort that’s gone into making these wines just adds to the celebration and adds to the depth of conversation and the feeling that it’s a special day.”

The winemakers’ remarks have been edited and condensed.



**BVLGARI**  
ROMA 1884



IN STYLE



# Need gift ideas? Pay attention.

People often provide clues to the presents they would like to receive, an influencer says. But he has some suggestions, just in case.

BY TANYA DUKES

Accumulating Instagram followers and curating an eye-catching wardrobe have always been integral to the success of a style influencer. But crafting a compelling presence on Substack, the online newsletter subscription platform, is the latest must-have.

Jalil Johnson, 25, completed that trifecta when he introduced “Consider Yourself Cultured” in 2023. He now sounds off to his thousands of subscribers on topics such as the return of the yuppie and the influence of Jackie O. And he also dispenses his advice as a consultant and through collaborations such as his current stylist-in-residence role for the online jewelry boutique At Present, for which he designed a capsule collection.

Always opinionated, he said the key to holiday shopping was paying “attention to people, hearing what they are thinking about, what they want, and what they want to try.” And when in doubt, he added, he leans on “little knickknacks that really make a home or pieces that add a little bit of personality” to a wardrobe.

Here, his suggestion of some gifts that would do all of that. His comments have been edited and condensed.

1. KNIT PICKING

Stöffa men's ribbed cashmere blouson, \$1,495

The first time I stepped into the Stöffa studio in New York, the clothes reminded me of the ones that Richard Gere wears in “American Gigolo.” All the fabrics are Italian. Everything's produced in Italy. The cashmere of this blouson is fantastic. It's delicious. I also love a cardigan style with pockets. I go crazy for a pocket because it's just so practical. You can easily wear this to a nice dinner, but you can also wear it around the house.

2. A BUNCH OF KARATS

Lionheart Elongated Chunky Pinched Link Bracelet, \$4,225

When I was first brought on by At Present, I did an edit, and this bracelet by Lionheart was in it. The weight was



KATHERINE MARKS FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

amazing. I cannot get it out of my head, how it felt on the wrist. When it comes to jewelry, I love a piece that has a presence to it, in the feel and the look. Also, this is a kind of investment piece because the prices for gold are going through the roof. Ideally, you would hold a piece of jewelry for the rest of your life, but if push comes to shove, this is also like an asset on your wrist.

3. LIGHT MY FIRE

Edie Parker Jelly Tabletop Lighter, \$195

This is just a quirky gift. I don't know if this would be the first thing you would buy for yourself, but if someone gave it to you, you would be overjoyed. I'm not really a smoker, but we light incense all the time and use a lighter for candles. There's a lot of practicality around it, where it's not just for those who smoke.

And it is a great conversation starter.

4. DON'T SCRATCH THE SURFACE

Epi.Logic Sensitive Skin RX, \$310

Something that's been really important to me on my skin care journey is finding products that help address issues that are for more melanated skin. I also love supporting Black-owned brands when I can. This gives you a few products to try out to see what works with your skin and what doesn't. If there's something that doesn't really suit your skin, you can give it to someone else. These are all their hero products, so you will get a great sampling of their offering. The packaging is amazing.

5. ON THE NOSE

Maison d'Etto Perfume Discovery Set, \$97

There's been a boom within niche perfumes, and I think they're offering something really nice compared to the big brand perfumers or the designer brands. The niche ones have much more of a story to tell; they give you kind of a reason to buy. Scents are a personal thing, but I think the discovery kit is great because you can test out which ones resonate with you. There is a vintage feel to the Maison d'Etto scents, which I love and adore. I love Karat EG, and then Canaan, which is one that I am obsessed with — it has notes of tube-rose.

6. IN GOOD TASTE

Flamingo Estate The Garden Tour, \$241

This pack gives you a great chance to try a lot of different items from Flamingo Estate. The olive oil is their flagship

product. The smell of their products is so clean that I think they would be universally liked. Even if there's a product in there that a person's not terribly fond of, I think you could easily regift some of these items, which is beautiful.

7. IT'S A WRAP

Tekla Terry hooded bathrobe, \$265

For my very first Christmas with my boyfriend, I will say I outdid myself. I gifted him a bathrobe with his monogram, and he was obsessed with it. A robe falls into those categories where, maybe, you'll buy it for yourself, but it's not like something that's top of mind, but if someone gives it to you, then you're like, “Oh, my God, how could I live without a bathrobe?” And I love Tekla specifically because of their colors. They have such fantastic colors, and they have also been doing amazing collaborations. They just did one with Auralee, the brand on everyone's radar.

8. SMOKE SHOW

Louise Roe Champagne stainless steel candle holder, \$175

Home items make perfect sense when it comes to gifting for the holidays. When we're shopping for ourselves, we think of the necessities and not the extra bits that will also make something nice and feel more lived-in. These candlesticks are fabulous. I'm a big fan of the '80s Brutalist movement. I love that they're very minimal, but they still have such an impact. I imagine them looking fantastic with a red candle.

9. PHOTO FINISH

“Guy Bourdin for Charles Jourdan,” \$75

What Guy Bourdin and Charles Jourdan did in terms of fashion photography is revolutionary. They added such a narrative to fashion photography, and both of them are highly referenced today. There's such sensuality in their work together that I think is quite beautiful and honestly something that we need back in the fashion spread. Fashion is research, extremely important. And I think the more that we know about it, the further we can go.

Shopping list

Left, Jalil Johnson, an Instagram influencer and Substack writer, has gift suggestions for the holiday season. They range from, above left, a men's cashmere blouson (with pockets), to, far right, a book of classic fashion photography.

FROM THE COVER

# Winemakers’ tips for special sipping

WINES, FROM PAGE S1

wines will last 200 to 300 years. I've personally tasted a Vin de Constance from 1791. You can buy a bottle from someone's birth year, your kids' birth years, put it in the cellar and forget about it.

Château d'Yquem is priced on the high end, but you're getting the greatest sweet wine in the world. The best of Bordeaux will cost you three times more than that, and the best of Burgundy will cost 10 times more than that. I have a relationship with the team. We were at Château d'Yquem last year and we had a grand dinner at the château and they opened everyone's birth year. The wine was basically a time capsule.



**DAVID DUNCAN**  
President and chief executive at Silver Oak Cellars, Napa Valley, Calif.

I have a very close family relationship with the Novak family of Spottswoode in

Napa. It's one of the brands I'd recommend — older vintage preferred. The parents of Beth Novak, who's running it today, were actually my godparents. They're right in the middle of St. Helena. It is this beautiful old Victorian home, and the wines are exquisite. It is one of my go-to holiday wines when I'm not drinking Silver Oak.

The second thing I would say — I asked my wife about this, so this is coming from the couple — would be Schramsberg, a good, solid bottle of bubbles. We do not put that in the cellar. We put it in the fridge when we get it. And Hugh Davies, who's the second-gen owner of Schramsberg today, is a great friend.

The last thing that came to mind was that I had the opportunity, 40 years ago, to drink a '58 BV [Beaulieu Vineyard] and a '58 Inglenook. I was about 18 or 19 years old. And so it was a big exciting thing for me. That was kind of an adult moment for me in the wine world that was transformative.



**DONAE BURSTON**  
Founder and chief executive at La Fête Wine Company, Miami

I founded La Fête in May 2019 to capture the essence of how rosé is consumed in the

South of France, where it's the first thing you have when everyone sits down together. And that was really the genesis: to think about rosé differently, to break seasonality.

We wanted to steal the thunder away from some of the other winemaking regions and really put Provence on the map. So if we stick with Provence and the rosé region, the pinnacle of rosé-making for a lot of us would be Domaines Ott Château Romassan. That's the gold standard. It's produced in Bandol. It's aged in oak and aged in wood. So it has a little bit of a different expression than what people are used to. A lot of times, people think of rosé as light and whimsical and lacking in flavor, body and structure. But it gives you all those things and really helps you to understand that while rosé is fun, it's also a great gastronomic wine.

Next up, I would say Salon Champagne — it's 100 percent chardonnay, single vineyard, single varietal Champagne. It really is the best expression of the way Champagne used to be made; it's not mass-produced. It's also a brand that not many people know. I like to give something that's a bit more esoteric.



**JUDY CHAN**  
President and chief executive at Grace Vineyard, Shanxi and Ningxia, China

A wine from China that I'd recommend is Ao Yun, the reason being

that they are owned by LVMH so it gives people a lot more confidence, especially if they have never tried Chinese wine be-



MIKE KAI CHEN FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

fore. It's a bit pricey, but they are also pioneers in the wine region in Yunnan. I always find it fascinating when people have the courage to do something that hasn't been done before. It's also more likely you can find Ao Yun because they are widely distributed.

I'd also recommend Domaine Chave Hermitage from the Rhône Valley in France — it's one of my favorite wines. I visited Jean-Louis Chave in Rhône many years ago, but he came to visit me in China first. And when he visited me in Shanxi, he said, “Your soil is very much

like ours.” When I went to visit him, I could tell their soil is very similar: It's very sandy and yellowish.

Part of why I recommend his wine is that when I went down to his cellar, he was very generous. And he has a very limited production. Wine is all about stories and relationships, it's not at all about price. If you have no linkage with a wine, if you don't know the producer or the winery, then it's just a wine. It's a very emotional product.



**HELEN MASTERS**  
Head winemaker at Ata Rang, Martinborough, New Zealand

Our Christmas is in summer and we're so sick of the winter that having a summer barbecue

on the beach and swimming and playing outdoor games and sports is our ideal of what Christmas should be. And the wine choices reflect that. You've always got to have a sparkling wine because that really makes the festive vibe. A producer that's really put their heart and soul into producing great bubbles in New Zealand is Quartz Reef in Central Otago; the 2017 Blanc de Blanc is a great example of Méthode Traditionnelle that really hits the mark, and it's made by a good friend.

But then we are hoping we are going to have some great seafood, maybe some crayfish or prawns. For that, I'd recommend two white wines: Vietti Arneis from Italy's Piedmont, dry and delicious, and Three Fates Albariño, from Hawke's Bay here in New Zealand. Every time you drink it, there is so much joy in the glass.

If I was buying for a real wine geek, I would gift Rippon 2021 Tinker's Field Pinot Noir, from Central Otago. And I'd also recommend a wine that's available in the United States, from an Australian producer, based in a region that's pretty obscure: the 2022 Clonakilla Shiraz Viognier from Canberra. It's always satisfying and delicious.

Bubbles

Left, grapes at the Schramsberg Vineyards in California. A good bottle of wine is a perfect gift to complement a special occasion.



IN SOUND

# Where anyone can become a star

At King Studio, clients work with a team of K-Pop professionals to record a song and sometimes even a music video

SEOUL

BY KATHLEEN BECKETT

The perfect gift for a K-pop wannabe? How about a recording session in a professional music studio?

One recent fall afternoon, Caro Ve Hondt descended the staircase of a small office building in the Gangnam district of Seoul and, once she was on the lower level, entered King Studio. The 25-year-old Belgian tourist had come to South Korea, in part at least, to record her favorite song, “Navillera,” popularized by the South Korean girl group Gfriend.

“I’m rewarding myself for graduating from college,” Ms. Ve Hondt said.

Waiting in the fully equipped recording studio, a team of professionals, led by Aiden Roh, was ready to help her.

Mr. Roh, who owns the studio, previously worked with K-pop groups such as Girls’ Generation and TVXQ!. Then seven years ago he decided to start the “You Can Also Be a K-Pop Star” program, catering to anyone with a dream (and willing to pay to realize it).

The music producer said he had a pool of 10 vocal directors he could call on. “After determining what the client wants to record, whether it’s a ballad or dance, we can decide which vocal director would be best to work with,” said Mr. Roh, 45.

For Ms. Ve Hondt, the choice was Ji-Seon Yeom, 27, and rounding out the team was Leina Lee, 40, who acted as a coordinator and translator (Ms. Ve Hondt doesn’t speak Korean and Ms. Yeom and Mr. Roh don’t speak English).

Ms. Ve Hondt sings in a community choir in Belgium, but when she saw that the bank of studio equipment looked much like the cockpit controls of an Airbus A330, she admitted, “I’m a little nervous.”

That is a typical reaction, Mr. Roh said, “So we try to make clients comfortable.”

Ms. Lee began by taking Ms. Ve Hondt into the soundproof recording room and introducing her to the equipment she would use during the two-hour Diamond package that she had purchased. The microphone, for example,



PHOTOGRAPHS VIA KING STUDIO

was “a German model U87; it’s what 90 percent of professional Korean singers use,” Ms. Lee said. She also explained that Ms. Ve Hondt should keep the width of her fist between the mic and her mouth, and showed her how to use the controls to adjust the volume.

Next, the vocal coaching started. Ms. Yeom sat at the piano and took Ms. Ve

Hondt through the scales, trying to decide which key she should use. “During rehearsal we adjust the key of the original song to match the client’s vocal range to create an optimal recording experience,” Mr. Roh said. “The process takes into account what the singer is comfortable with while maintaining the original feel of the song.”

They decided Ms. Ve Hondt should sing in F sharp minor, the original key of the song.

Then, with Ms. Lee translating, Ms. Yeom coached Ms. Ve Hondt on how to project her voice: “Loosen your shoulders” . . . “Breathe deeply” . . . “Pant like a puppy” . . . “Sing each syllable and it will sound more powerful.”

After a half-hour rehearsal, it was time to start recording. The lyrics to “Navillera” — which, in Korean, suggests the fluttering feeling, like a butterfly, that a crush can produce — had been printed out in Romanized Korean for Ms. Ve Hondt to follow.

The entire three-minute and 14-second song was not recorded at once, but divided into nine sections; each one was sung again and again and again until the pros, and the client, were pleased and ready to move on.

In all, the process took more than an hour, punctuated by encouragement from Ms. Yeom (with help from Ms. Lee) all along the way: “You did really great, but” . . . “This time your sound was perfect, but. . . .”

Mr. Roh was at the controls throughout the session, editing and mixing. When the final stanza had been sung, approved and recorded, Ms. Ve Hondt left the recording room to hear the result, taking a seat in the control room “between the woofer and the speaker, the golden triangle, the best position to listen,” Ms. Lee said.

Move over Blackpink, Ms. Ve Hondt was pleased: “It was good to get all the advice, and good to have a finished project. I enjoyed doing this — it was such fun.”

Mr. Roh said he would continue to work on the recording, sending the finished CD to Ms. Ve Hondt in about two weeks. (The session had run about 20 minutes over schedule, but no one seemed to be rushing.)

King Studio offers five packages, ranging from 1.5 hours (400,000 won, or \$286) to a four-hour program that includes hair and makeup styling and the production of a music video (1.5 million won). There also is a group option.

The most popular session, the two-hour one that Ms. Ve Hondt purchased, is 500,000 won.

Business has been brisk, Mr. Roh said: “We get 50 to 60 clients a month, and during the peak season of October to January, even more.” The sessions are conducted in Korean, with English, Japanese and Chinese translation available, and Mr. Roh said it had attracted customers from around the world who hoped to be the next Jungkook or at least get a taste of his world.

Hit tracks

Top, Caro Ve Hondt, who is from Belgium, decided to sign up for a recording session as a reward for graduating from college. Bottom, Ji-Seon Yeom, left, and Leina Lee, worked with Ms. Ve Hondt, who sang in a soundproof recording room, right, at King Studio.

SEASONAL

## What teens want

The wish list for some teenagers from Ireland includes soccer shoes, makeup, jewelry and pajamas



WESTPORT, IRELAND

BY SANDRA JORDAN

Sometimes holiday shopping for teenagers must seem like an impossible task. Trends change at the scroll of a phone screen — what tops a most-desired list today may be seriously uncool tomorrow.

So to get some ideas, The New York Times checked with some teens in Westport, a small town of about 7,000 people in County Mayo, on Ireland’s west coast.

“If I could have anything,” said Mounir Soufan, 13, “I’d like a new bike — a Trek. They’re for racing, and I love racing!” (the Trek Domane AL 2 Rim starts at 829 euros, or \$999.99 in the United States).

New soccer shoes also were high on the list for Mounir, a first-year student at Rice College, a secondary school in Westport — his shoes, or boots as they are called in Ireland, were stolen at a rugby match in October. “My dad wasn’t happy,” he said with a sigh.

“I’d like the new Adidas ones,” he said, “the Predator Elite Fold-Overs. They’re expensive, though” (starting at €260). Although, he added, with a laugh, “Actually, it doesn’t matter what boots you have; it matters what the player can do.”

At the Krem Gelateria & Cafe, four 16-year-old girls on their lunch break from Sacred Heart School in Westport were quite willing to discuss Christmas presents.

Ellie Jordan said she would like to get pajamas; the others agreed and said any brand would do. “Really cozy, fluffy ones,” said Kyla Rabbett. Ellie and Caoimhe O’Carroll agreed.

But Róisín Kelly said she preferred hers “kind of satiny and light.” As the conversation continued, they all laughed when they discovered that it was their grannies who buy their Christmas pajamas.

Cosmetics also were in demand: mascara, concealers, tanning creams and blushers. When buying for themselves,

the girls all choose inexpensive products from E.L.F. or Primark. But if someone else is paying? “Charlotte Tilbury!” said Róisín, to everyone’s agreement. “And Nars!” said Kyla, and they all nodded. Ellie added, “I’d like a Rare Beauty blush.” (The Selena Gomez brand has a mini 3.2-milliliter liquid blush for €17.)

Like much of the rest of the teenage world, their preferred perfumes are by Sol de Janeiro (90 milliliters for €24). They also wanted hair products: leave-in conditioners, hair masks and glosses. Caoimhe, whose hair was tied in a slick-back ponytail, would like a Smooth Stick from The Smooth Company (€16.99). “It’s for keeping down your flyaways,” she explained.

All the girls said they would appreciate jewelry: rings, earrings, bracelets, charms, anything from Pandora. And Caoimhe would like charms for her Nomination bracelet, a stretchy band that becomes a base for collectible links (€20-€137).

Mattie McLoughlin, 16, a fifth-year student at Sancta Maria College, in the nearby town of Louisburgh, also would appreciate footwear — particularly soccer shoes from the Nike Tiempo range (€44.99-€259.99). Off the pitch, “I’d like a nice jacket, maybe a Nike, a puffer (€129.99-€399.99),” he said, “and probably a fragrance or two, I like Paco Rabanne and Jean Paul Gaultier.”

Tara Ginnelly, 18, is taking a gap year to travel around Asia as she has graduated from Sancta Maria College. She loves “all things makeup,” especially Charlotte Tilbury products. “She’s great but so pricey,” she said. “I would never spend €45 on a bronzer.” Other gifts? “Concert tickets are a big thing among older teens,” she added, “and flight or travel vouchers would be great.”

Tara is also into jewelry, and she is going to study gemology next year. “Now that I’m 18, I’d like slightly nicer jewelry,” she said, “It doesn’t have to be a brand, just good quality silver or gold. I’m a bracelets and rings person; I’d love a simple gold band with a small sapphire — that’s my birthstone.”

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